Contesting Seclusion: The Political Emergence of Muslim Women in Bhopal, 1901-1930

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This study examines the emergence of Indian Muslim women as politicians and social reformers in the early years of the twentieth century by focussing on the state of Bhopal, a small Muslim principality in Central India, which was ruled by a succession of female rulers throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The last Begam of Bhopal, Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam (1858-1930, r. 1901-1926), emerges as the main figure in this history, though a substantial effort has also been made to examine the activities of other Bhopali women, whether poor, privileged or princely. Special significance has been attached to their changing attitudes to class, gender and communal identities, using the veil as a metaphor for women's expanding concerns. Their connections with wider movements of social reform have also been emphasized in an attempt to show that the emergence of women in Bhopal was representative of a broader development occurring amongst Muslim women, both within India and throughout the Islamic world. The importance of this study lies in its treatment of the 'daughters of reform,' the first generation of Muslim women who contributed to the reformist discourse, particularly at the regional level, as complex subjects in possession of a history. It is also significant in that it redresses the paucity of academic literature on the princely states of India, highlighting the differences between states and the changes that occurred over time, rather than simply dismissing the princes as frivolous reminders of a by-gone age. The main theme that arises is the importance for early Muslim female activists of balancing continuity and innovation. By operating within the framework of Islam, Bhopali women were able to build on traditional norms in order to introduce incremental change. As many of their achievements were unforseen, however, their story is as much one of paradox, as of progress.

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Abbreviations

AGG	Agent to the Governor-General in Central India
AIWC	All-India Women's Conference
AS	Agency Surgeon
B	Bundle Number
BPA	Bhopal Political Agency
BSR	Bhopal State Records of the Political Department, Bhopal State
CIA	Central India Agency
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CR	Crown Representative Records
CS	Chief Secretary
DPS	Deputy Political Secretary
F&P	Foreign and Political Department
FFMA	Friends' Foreign Missionary Association
FSC	Friends' Service Council
GOI	Government of India
HS	Honorary Secretary
MEC	Muhammadan Educational Conference
NAI(B)	National Archives of India, Bhopal
NAI(ND)	National Archives of India, New Delhi
NCWI	National Council of Women in India
PA	Political Agent in Bhopal
PD	Political Department
PS	Political Secretary
PSV	Private Secretary to the Viceroy
RR	Residency Records
WIA	Women's Indian Association

Introduction

> Undoubtedly the barometer of social change in the Moslem world is the veil. Where the veil persists without variation, the life of the Moslem woman is like the blank walled streets of Bhopal, India, which afford no outlook from within and no contact from without. But the Bhopal streets within the last few years have been pierced by a few small windows, very high up to be sure, but breaking the dead monotony, and one can imagine some purdah woman unseen looking out on the street below. The Moslem woman's veil, even in the most conservative places, betrays some suggestion of movement; in some places it is slowly being lifted and elsewhere it has even entirely disappeared.[1]
>
> -Ruth Frances Woodsmall,
> *Moslem Women Enter a New World* (1936)

From the earliest contact with the Muslim world, outsiders have expressed their intense fascination with the institution of the veil by writing generalized descriptions of women 'behind the purdah' or 'within the harem.' Many of these depictions, ranging from Niccolao Manucci's account of the Mughal court in the seventeenth century[2] to Jean P. Sasson's recent bestseller on Saudi Arabia, *Princess*,[3] have focussed on the more titillating aspects of life in seclusion, characterizing the zenana as a cushioned world of pleasure and luxury. Hidden from view, the woman behind the hijab is mysterious, alluring, seductive. Such a portrayal has similarly fuelled the imaginations of generations of Urdu poets, who lament their separation from their cruel beloved behind the curtain.[4] Other chroniclers have, in contrast, emphasized the physical circumstances in which veiled Muslim women live, offering vivid, if not unpleasant, descriptions of the cramped and unhealthy conditions of the chardivari. In this picture, the purdahnashin is silenced, overworked and powerless. Previously popular with Christian missionaries,[5] this portrayal has once again become prevalent in the contemporary media, as part of the demonization of the Islamic world.[6]

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[1] Ruth Frances Woodsmall. *Moslem Women Enter a New World*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936, 40.
[2] Niccolao Manucci. *Storia do Mogor; or Mogul India, 1653-1708*. 4 vols. Tr. by William Irvine. London: J. Murray, 1907-8.
[3] Jean P. Sasson. *Princess*. London: Bantam Books, 1994.
[4] Consider, for example, a couplet by Saqyb Zirvi, a modern Pakistani poet: "The beating of my heart has become the gay music of desire / Whose footsteps do I hear behind the curtain?" Quoted in Muhammad Abd-al-Rahman Barker, Khwaja Muhammad Shafi Dihlavi and Hasan Jahangir Hamdani, eds. *A Reader of Modern Urdu Poetry*. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968, 11.
[5] See Mrs. McClure. "Social Hindrances" in Annie Von Sommer and Samuel M. Zwemer. *Daylight in the Harem: A New Era for Moslem Women*. Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1911, 93-101.
[6] See Maggie O'Kane. "A Holy Betrayal," *The Guardian Weekend*, 29 Nov., 1997, 39-45.

The terms *parda* (curtain), *ḥaram* (women's apartments), *ḥijāb* (veil, curtain), *zanāna* (women's quarters), *chārdivārī* (four walls (of the house)) and *pŭrda-nishīn* (a veiled woman), used above in their common English forms, all relate to the practice of secluding women in order to guarantee a high standard of female modesty in society. This complex social system is observed throughout the Muslim world, as well as in certain other religious communities, though not in a homogenous way. For different Muslim women, being in purdah or wearing the *hijab* can mean strict seclusion within the female quarters of a walled residence, donning a *burqa* or large scarf when leaving the house or simply behaving modestly before members of the opposite sex. These varying manifestations of the veil have been analyzed in depth in fairly recent years by both anthropologists and historians, who have concluded that purdah observance is closely related to other social factors in a given society.[7]

While efforts have been made to better understand the custom of purdah, little attempt has been made to actually get beyond it. The tendency to talk only about the veil in the context of Muslim women is all too strong, especially in more popular forms of writing. This focus has meant that Muslim women are perceived as being limited to a static domestic role. Issues of their socio-economic status, political identity or educational development are largely ignored. Yet the woman behind the veil need not be such a passive figure. Since the time of Muhammad, there has been a myriad of strong and independent Muslim women, veiled and unveiled, who have negotiated a space within the public sphere, distinguishing themselves as scholars, rulers, architects, healers and even warriors.[8] It is essential that their forgotten stories be told, if the widespread misconceptions about women in Islam, so common in the current political climate in the West, are to be countered.

This study aims to take a step in this direction by looking at the emergence of Indian Muslim women as politicians and social reformers in the early years of the twentieth century.

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[7] For general anthropological studies on purdah in the Indian context, see Patricia Jeffrey. *Frogs in a Well.* London: Zed Books, 1979; and David G. Mandelbaum. *Women's Seclusion and Men's Honour: Sex Roles in North India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.* Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1988. For studies relating directly to the geographical area discussed in this thesis, see the work of Doranne Jacobson, most notably, *Hidden Faces: Hindu and Muslim Purdah in a Central Indian Village.* Ph.D thesis, Columbia University, 1970; and "The Veil of Virtue: Purdah and the Muslim Family in the Bhopal Region of Central India" in Imtiaz Ahmad, ed. *Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India.* Columbia: South Asia Books, 1976, 169-215. A historical dimension is added to the discussion on Indian purdah in Hanna Papanek and Gail Minault, eds. *Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia.* Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1982. A comparable study in the Middle Eastern context is Fatima Mernissi. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society.* London: Al Saqi, 1985 (rev. ed.).

[8] Some of these early figures are discussed in Fatima Mernissi. *The Forgotten Queens of Islam.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994; and Leila Ahmed. *Women and Gender in Islam.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Stress will be placed on the early development of their thought and style of activities, identifying three main phases: the first, which roughly spanned the first decade of the century, was a period when elite Muslim women began to participate in the social reform debate, usually at the encouragement of men, through their involvement with the print media. These early female authors were initially able to negotiate a space within the existing discourse by echoing the prevailing opinions of male reformers in much of their writing. Having established their voice, they then began to identify other issues which were of specific importance to Muslim women. During the second phase, a period which included the pre-war and war years, many of the same women initiated social reform activities and organizations, which aimed to take practical steps for women's education and emancipation. The leaders of this movement sought to justify their unprecedented action by strictly maintaining traditional norms in the new institutions. It was not until the 1920s that a larger group of Muslim women began to display an increased degree of politicization and radicalism, taking part in overtly political movements and openly conflicting with male Muslim leaders. The 'first generation' of Muslim female activists was able to facilitate this emergence, not by 'storming the bastions of male supremacy,' but by gradually building on traditional norms in order to introduce limited change. Thus, the main theme that emerges out of this study is the importance for Muslim women of this era of balancing continuity and innovation. This scheme of development naturally continued in the years leading up to Partition, although the present study will end in the year 1930. This was before the commencement of the widespread popular movements of the 1930s and 1940s, which introduced a more complex range of factors to the question of Muslim women's political identity.[9]

Various methods have been employed in this work to look at the emergence of this pioneering group of women in more detail. First of all, special significance has been attached to the changing attitudes of Muslim women to their class, gender and communal identities. Though gender is a fairly straightforward concept, both class and community are variable notions that require some explanation. This is all the more true in the context of post-1857 India, a period when indigenous groups were seeking to accommodate themselves to the new

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[9] For a discussion of this later period, see Sarfaraz Husain Mirza. *Muslim Women's Role in the Pakistan Movement*. Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1969. The autobiographical works of active women are also useful: see Jahan Ara Shahnawaz. *Father and Daughter*. Lahore: Nigarishat, 1971; Begum Shaista Ikramullah. *From Purdah to Parliament*. London: The Cressat Press, 1963; and Attia Hosain. *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1954.

colonial order. For Muslims of the old 'service classes,' displaced by the fall of the Mughal dynasty, a vital aspect of this process was to redefine the concept of high status contained in the Urdu word *sharif* (pl. *ashraf*) in terms of their new socio-economic surroundings. The sense of 'nobility' attached to *sharif* status shifted from being a characteristic of birth to an aspect of good character. The *sharif* gentleman was no longer epitomized by the extravagant nawab, who squandered his resources and neglected his religion; rather, it was one who was educated, pious and restrained in his behaviour.[10] This process of negotiation similarly led Muslim reformers to begin addressing themselves to a particular community as had been defined by the colonial state. The 'Indian Muslims,' previously fragmented by social, economic and geographic factors, were increasingly identified as a homogenous group with specific interests.[11] As will be seen, the uplift of women became a crucial aspect of the reformists' program to improve the status of *sharif* Muslims and, in turn, the whole Indian Muslim community.

A second method has been to limit this study geographically to the women of Bhopal, a small Muslim state in Central India, which was founded in 1709 when Dost Muhammad Khan, an Afghan adventurer, broke with the declining Mughal regime to establish a fort and small principality in the region.[12] This choice of locality is not, of course, arbitrary, but based on the long history of female power and influence in the state. From its very establishment, Bhopal boasted prominent women figures, who were active in public and political life; Dost Muhammad's own wife, Fatah Bibi, successfully defended the fledgling principality against warring Rajputs and Marathas when her husband returned to Afghanistan to gather kinsmen and supporters.[13] She was succeeded in influence by Mamola Bai (known as Maji Sahiba) and Saliha Begam (known as Bahu Begam), the wives of two subsequent rulers, who

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[10] Despite this change, the term *sharif* has continued to refer to Muslim groups such as Sayyids, Shaikhs, Mughals and Pathans that claim descent from foreign ancestry. The persistence of hierarchy based on birth is verified in Imtiaz Ahmad, ed. *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India*. New Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1973.

[11] For an examination of *sharif* culture and the creation of the 'Indian Muslim' identity, see David Lelyveld. *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996 (reprint), ch. 1-2.

[12] Bhopal's early history is a fascinating tale of wars, plots and intrigue. It is recorded in some detail in Shah Jahan Begam. *Tāj-ul Ikbāl Tārīkh-i-Bhōpāl or The History of Bhopal*. Tr. by H.C. Barstow. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1876. A more succinct and often more accurate account can be found in C.E. Luard. *Bhopal State Gazetteer*. Vol. III. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1908, 9-35.

[13] In commemoration of her success, Dost Muhammad named both the fort at Bhopal (Fatah Garh) and the emblem of the state (Fatah Nishan) after his wife. Muhammad Amin Zuberi. *Begamat-i-Bhopal*. Bhopal: Ruler of Bhopal, 1918, 13-16.

effectively administered the state throughout the middle of the eighteenth century. Both receive extensive mention, the first for her goodness and sense and the second for her treachery and oppression, in all general histories of the state, both in English and Urdu, a fact that is remarkable when considering the frequent concealment of women's influence in Muslim states.[14] Though less well-known, Bhopal's royal women of the late eighteenth century, notably 'Asmat Begam, Zeenat Begam and Moti Begam, continued to play a prominent role in the political development of the state, courageously manipulating both internal and external threats to its sovereignty.[15] Their martial spirit was reflected in the general population of Bhopali women in 1812, when the city was besieged for six months by the chiefs of Nagpur and Gwalior. When the Nagpuri army breached one of the gates, women of the city bombarded them with stones and bricks until they were compelled to retreat.[16]

Women's political influence in Bhopal was carried a stage further in 1819 when the ruling Nawab died suddenly, leaving his eighteen-year-old widow, Qudsia Begam, to be invested with the supreme authority of the state. Appointed regent by the British Political Agent until her daughter, Sikandar, came of age and married, Qudsia emerged from behind the veil, hired a tutor to teach her the necessary skills of riding and the arts of war, then proceeded to introduce wide ranging reforms, most notably water works.[17] Sikandar Begam followed in this tradition, forcibly claiming the throne from her husband and proving herself to be a highly competent ruler. She distinguished herself, in particular, for her loyalty to the British during the Mutiny and for large-scale administrative reforms.[18] As a result, the British withdrew their proviso that the husband of the Begam would become Nawab, naming her only daughter, Shah Jahan Begam, as sovereign in her own right upon the death of Sikandar in 1867.[19] When Shah Jahan Begam also failed to bear a son, the dynasty of female rule in

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[14] See William Hough. *A Brief History of the Bhopal Principality in Central India*. Calcutta: The Baptist Mission Press, 1845, 6-24; Tayyebah Bi. *Tarikh Farman-rawa'i'an Bhopal*. Bhopal: Bhopal Book House, 1977; and Kamla Mittal. *History of Bhopal State: Development of Constitution, Administration and National Awakening, 1901-1949*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1990, 6-10.

[15] Zuberi, *Begamat-i-Bhopal*, 25-35.

[16] Shah Jahan Begam, *Tāj-ul Ikbāl*, 32. It will be seen in the chapters that follow how Sultan Jahan Begam often evoked this incident to encourage Muslim women's participation in the public sphere.

[17] For a sketch of Qudsia Begam's reign, see Sultan Jahan Begam. *Hayat-i-Qudsi: Life of the Nawab Gauhar Begum alias The Nawab Begum Qudsia of Bhopal*. Tr. by W.S. Davis. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1918.

[18] For a short sketch of Sikandar's reign, see Sambhu Chandra Mukhopadhyaya. *The Career of an Indian Princess: The late Begum Secunder of Bhopal, K.S.I.* Calcutta: Anglo-Sanskrit Press, 1869.

[19] For a sketch of Shah Jahan Begam's reign, see Sultan Jahan Begam. *Hayat-i-Shahjehani: Life of Her Highness the Late Nawab Shahjehan Begum of Bhopal*. Tr. by B. Ghosal. Bombay: The Times Press, 1926.

Bhopal was confirmed. Her daughter, Sultan Jahan Begam, succeeded to the throne in 1901 for a twenty-five year reign as the last Begam of Bhopal, before abdicating in favour of her son in 1926. It is the period from her accession to the throne in 1901 until her death in 1930 that will be focussed on in this study, although the reigns of the earlier Begams will be mentioned in laying the historical context for each chapter.[20]

Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam Saheba moulded the state of Bhopal into a centre for the reform of India's Muslim women, establishing unique social and educational institutions and placing herself at the forefront of national efforts for female uplift. Her 'larger than life' presence has meant that she has largely dominated the available sources and, as a consequence, this discussion. My decision to allow her to commandeer the story is not unjustified if one considers the great sway which she held over her subjects or the fact that she was commonly identified with her state by contemporary British and Indian observers.[21] I have not given in entirely though: a substantial effort has been made to examine the activities of other Bhopali women, whether poor, privileged or princely. With regard to the communal issues elucidated above, it is important to note that the women of Bhopal, even at the elite level, were not, of course, all Muslims. In fact, the Muslim community consisted of only 54% of the population in urban areas and as low as 12% at the state level, a figure which reflects the identification of Muslims in the state with government and other high status pursuits.[22] As a result, there are many Hindu and Christian women who play a significant part in this history, but Muslim women remain in the leading roles. Their connections with wider movements of social reform have been emphasized in an attempt to show that the emergence of the women of Bhopal was representative of a broader development occurring amongst Muslim women, both within India and throughout the Islamic world.

The final method which I have used is to accept Ruth Frances Woodsmall's assertion, made after her own journey to India in the late 1920s, that the veil can be used as a "barometer" of social and political change. Symbolizing the shifting boundaries between public and private, personal and political, the veil focusses attention on the wider changes that occurred for Muslim women in India between 1901 and 1930, proving itself to be an appropriate metaphor for women's expanding concerns. As indicated above, the institution

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[20] For the genealogy of Bhopal's ruling family, see Appendix I.

[21] See, for example, William Barton. *The Princes of India*. London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd, 1934; and Begam Humayon Mirza. *Roznamchah Safar Bhopal*. Hyderabad, 1924.

[22] Luard, *Bhopal State Gazetteer*, vol. III, 78-98.

of purdah came under severe attack in the nineteenth century from Christian missionaries, who lamented the adverse effects that it had on women's health and education, as well as their own proselytizing enterprises.[23] This condemnation led Muslim reformers to make the issue of purdah observance a central aspect of their reformist programs. As will be seen in the chapters that follow, their varying positions on the veil reflected the range of views on the appropriate status of women within Indian Muslim society. For women reformers, these views were expressed, not only in speeches and tracts, but also by their own example. As they began to make advances in education, health care, social organization and even national politics, their veils began, as Woodsmall noted, to be slowly lifted or even disappear.

Bridging the 'Missing Link': A Historiographical Survey

My attention was initially drawn to the princely state of Bhopal by a passing reference in a popular travel book on contemporary Muslim women in India. The eleventh of many vignette-like chapters in Anees Jung's *Night of the New Moon* began:

> In the heart of every Muslim woman in Bhopal survives a magical island. She traces it back to a vision, of four women who ruled and guided the destinies of the state for more than a hundred years. They ruled like men, rode horses and elephants, wore no veil and were referred to as Nawabs. In today's Bhopal, a city that has moved like any other, their memories live on, striking echoes in the daily lives of people.[24]

This less than scholarly mention of a "magical island" suggested that there was more to the history of Indian Muslim women than tales of sexual frustration or domestic drudgery behind the veil. Here, in Bhopal, was a long chain of politically powerful Muslim women, who had made a lasting impact on the public domain. Their histories naturally became the focus for my study.

This work on the women of Bhopal emerges as part of a fairly recent move on the part of scholars to begin treating Muslim women as more complex subjects in possession of a history. This development, having originated in the Middle East, has led, in the first instance, to the publication of valuable collections on the changing roles of the women in that region, including Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie's *Women in the Muslim World* and Nikki Keddie and

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[23] As early as 1796, William Carey of the Baptist mission noted that seclusion prevented women, not only from receiving a decent education, but also from "hearing the word." E. Daniel Potts. *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967, 38.

[24] Anees Jung. *Night of the New Moon: Encounters with Muslim Women in India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993, 41.

Beth Baron's *Women in Middle Eastern Society*.[25] In recent years, more localized studies have also emerged, which examine the effects of the colonial encounter on women's status in Egypt, Iran and other states.[26] Focussing on the Islamic heartland, these works provide a useful background for studies on other parts of the Muslim world.

In the Indian context, scholarly work on the history of Muslim women has been pioneered by Gail Minault and Barbara Metcalf. Their extensive writings continue to be the definitive work on the topic, despite the recent proliferation of broad studies on Indian Muslim women,[27] because they provide, not only intricate detail, but also an analytical framework. Both authors have approached the study of Muslim women from the perspective of movements for socio-religious reform and, as a result, their work can be seen to build on earlier studies of Aligarh College and the Deoband madrasa.[28] Their conceptual approach also relates to Kenneth W. Jones' broad study of reform movements, in which he identifies a dichotomy between "transitional movements," which were pre-colonial in origin and made use of indigenous models of dissent, and "acculturative movements," which resulted from cultural reaction in the colonial era.[29] As Metcalf has identified, two corresponding strands emerged in the movement for Muslim women's reform in the late nineteenth century: the first was led by the *'ulama*, who, steeped in Islamic tradition, devised a program of reform largely independently of European influence. The second incorporated social reformers and apologists, who, motivated by their encounter with the colonial power, responded directly to European critiques and took example from Western prototypes.[30] This model is not, of course, without fluidity: the *'ulama* were affected by the European presence in India, just as the reformers preserved continuities with pre-British Indian society. Nevertheless, it provides a useful tool for analyzing the process of interaction between the colonial power and the

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[25] Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie, eds. *Women in the Muslim World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978; and Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, eds. *Women in Middle Eastern History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

[26] See, for example, Margot Badran. *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995; and Parvin Paidar. *Women and the Political Processes in Twentieth-Century Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

[27] See, for example, Shahida Lateef. *Muslim Women in India: Political and Private Realities, 1890-1980*. London: Zed Books, 1990; and Azra Asghar Ali. *The Emergence of Feminism Among Indian Muslim Women, 1920-47*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1996.

[28] Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*; and Barbara Metcalf. *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

[29] Kenneth W. Jones. *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 3-4.

[30] Barbara D. Metcalf. "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women in British India" in Zoya Hasan, ed. *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities, and the State*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994, 6-14.

Indian Muslim community.

The writings of Minault and Metcalf are, to a large degree, distinguished by their focus on one of these two strands. Metcalf has concentrated specifically on the efforts of the reformist *'ulama*, most notably, Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi of Deoband, to improve the moral and material lives of women and their families by educating them in the 'true' practices of Islam. Her recent translation and commentary on Thanawi's *Bihishti Zewar* [Heavenly Ornaments], as well as her various articles on the subject, not only provide an admirable internal critique of Thanawi's writing, but also place it in the context of reformist writing of the Deoband school. She has not, however, identified the effect which this guide for middle- and upper-class women has had on female readers throughout the ages. Undoubtedly, this was not her intention, but it remains an important area for investigation.[31]

Minault, on the other hand, has launched a lengthy inquiry into educational activities for *sharif* women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by reformers of the Aligarh school, including Shaikh 'Abdullah, Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali and Sayyid Karamat Husain. Her numerous articles, as well as her recent book, *Secluded Scholars*, primarily identify Muslim women, as Metcalf does, as the objects of a male reformist program. She analyzes the development of reformist tracts on women's reform, Urdu journals for women, early girls' schools and inaugural ladies' conferences, all of which were guided, if not run by men. This focus is somewhat justified if one accepts her premise that the movement for women's education among Indian Muslim was pioneered by "articulate and literate men," who were also at the forefront of other prominent educational ventures, including the Muhammadan Educational Conference.[32] There were, however, women's voices, notably, those of the

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[31] Barbara Daly Metcalf. *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; "Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī and Urdu literature" in Christopher Shackle, ed. *Urdu and Muslim South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, 93-100; "Islam and Custom in Nineteenth-Century India: the Reformist Standard of Maulana Thanawi's *Bihishti Zewar*," *Contributions to Asian Studies*, 17 (1982), 62-78; "The Making of a Muslim Lady" in Milton Israel and N.K. Wagle, eds. *Islamic Society and Culture*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1983, 17-38; and "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women in British India," 1-21.

[32] Gail Minault. *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998; "Sayyid Karamat Husain and Muslim Women's Education" in Violette Graff, ed. *Lucknow: Memories of a City*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, 155-164; "Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali and *Tahzīb un-Niswān*: Women's Rights in Islam and Women's Journalism in Urdu" in Kenneth W. Jones, ed. *Religious Controversy in British India*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, 179-199; "'*Ismat*: Rāshid ul Khairī's Novels and Urdu Literary Journalism for Women" in Shackle, *Urdu and Muslim South Asia*, 93-100; "Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and 'Huquq un-Niswan': An Advocate of Women's Rights in Islam in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies*, 24, 1 (1990), 147-172; "Urdu Women's Magazines in the Early Twentieth Century," *Manushi*, 48 (Sept.-Oct., 1988), 2-9; *Voices of Silence: English Translation of Altaf Husain Hali's Majalis un-Nissa and Chup ki Dad*. Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1986; "Shaikh Abdullah, Begam Abdullah, and

Begams of Bhopal, that were being heard throughout the same period.

In her work on the 1910s and 1920s, Minault has managed, at least to a degree, to get beyond the male-regulated agenda in order to discuss early social and political organization by Muslim women themselves. In the final chapter of *Secluded Scholars*, as well as other short articles, she discusses the emerging views of the "daughters of reform," the first generation of women who received a school education, took up a profession or contributed to Urdu journalism.[33] Minault's work in this direction represents an admirable beginning, although these women, as she admits herself, "deserve a much fuller study" than they have, as yet, been given. Similarly, she notes that the activities of Muslim women from different regions in India require a more comprehensive investigation.[34] Minault has focussed on the Urdu-speaking reformers of North India, with only an occasional mention of other centres of Muslim reform such as Hyderabad, Bombay, Calcutta and Bhopal. Recent work on Begam Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain of Bengal by Roushan Jahan, Yasmin Hossain and others has begun to redress this geographic disparity.[35] Nevertheless, the regional aspects of Muslim reform still need to be analyzed in much more detail.

From this brief summary, one can identify many 'missing links' in the historiography on Indian Muslim women, some of which this study hopes to fill by looking specifically at the first generation of Muslim female activists from Bhopal. As a second aim, it intends to take a step towards redressing the paucity of academic literature on the princely states of India. Nearly six hundred principalities, including Bhopal, continued to exist throughout the colonial period as a result of 'treaties of friendship and cooperation' which were signed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century between local rulers and the East India Company. Including two-fifths of the area and one-third of the population of the British Indian Empire, they ranged from tiny feudal estates, occupying just an acre of land, to vast country-like

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Sharif Education for Girls at Aligarh" in Imtiaz Ahmad, ed. *Modernization and Social Change Among Muslims in India*. New Delhi: Manmohar, 1983, 207-236; and "Purdah's Progress: The Beginnings of School Education for Indian Muslim Women" in Jagdish P. Sharma, ed. *Individuals and Ideas in Modern India*. Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1982, 76-97.

[33] Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 267-307; "Purdah Politics: The Role of Muslim Women in Indian Nationalism, 1911-1924" in Papanek and Minault, *Separate Worlds*, 243-261; "Sisterhood or Separatism? The All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference and the Nationalist Movement" in Gail Minault, ed. *The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*. Columbia: South Asia Books, 1981, 83-108.

[34] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 11.

[35] Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. *Sultana's Dream and Selections from the Secluded Ones*. Ed. and tr. by Roushan Jahan. New York: The Feminist Press, 1988; N.Y. Hossain. *Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain 1880-1932: The Status of Muslim Women in Bengal*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1996; and Sonia Nishat Amin. *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876-1939*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.

entities with modern political and economic institutions. Ruled by Maharajas, Nizams, Ranas and Nawabs, they survived as pockets of indigenous rule, distinct from the Indian provinces and largely untouched by British encroachment.[36] Vast numbers of books have been published over the last few decades on colonial South Asia, but the distinctive histories of these fascinating states have been largely ignored as a topic for enquiry.

More often than not, the colourful history of the princes has been seized upon by popular writers for gossip-filled accounts or glossy coffee-table books. Vibrant photographs have been mingled with royal tales, real and imagined, in the hope of profiting from the now deposed rulers. Typical of this genre is John Lord's *The Maharajahs*, which provides entertaining anecdotes about a range of prominent Indian rulers, giving them such charming titles as "The Heir of Sadness" (the Maharaja of Dewas Senior), "The Tiger Freak" (The Maharaja of Gwalior) and "The Man Who Was a Goddess" (The Maharaja of Mysore).[37] There are just a handful of academic books which seriously address the history of the princely states. The majority of these, including Ian Copland's *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire*, Barbara Ramusack's *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire* and Steven Ashton's *British Policy Towards the Indian States*, focus on diplomatic relations between the princes and the British government in the run-up to Indian independence. Social, economic or internal political developments within individual states are not covered, except where they relate to imperial politics.[38]

The volume edited by Robin Jeffrey, *People, Princes and Paramount Power*, considers similar grand themes, but includes several articles on the political activities in particular states.[39] This individual treatment of a state's political history has also been provided by a few

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[36] The diverse nature of the princely states has recently been commented on by Ian Copland in *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire 1917-1947*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 8-11.

[37] John Lord's description of the Begam of Bhopal is not so poetic; she is simply "A Relatively Liberated Woman." *The Maharajas*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1972. Other books of this type include: Charles Allen and Sharada Dwivedi. *Lives of the Indian Princes*. London: Century Publishing, 1984; Ann Morrow. *Highness: The Maharajahs of India*. London: Grafton Books, 1986: and Diwan Jarmani Dass. *Maharaja; Lives and Loves and Intrigues of Indian Princes*. Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1969.

[38] Copland, *Princes*; Barbara Ramusack. *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire: Dissolution of a Patron-Client System, 1914-1939*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978; and Steven Ashton. *British Policy Towards the Indian States, 1905-1939*. London: Curzon Press, 1982.

[39] See, for example, John Wood's "Indian Nationalism in the Princely Context: The Rajkot Satyagraha of 1938-9" and Barbara Ramusack's "Maharajas and Gurudwaras: Patiala and the Sikh Community" in Robin Jeffrey, ed. *People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978, 170-204, 240-274. Hyderabad, Baroda, Travancore and Mewar are also covered.

authors, including Copland, Jeffrey and Ramusack, in various journal articles.[40] It is only in recent years, however, that more extensive studies on internal political events within princely states have began to emerge and, as yet, these have mostly focussed on the last years of princely rule. Two studies of this type on Bhopal are Kamla Mittal's *History of Bhopal State* and Rajendra Verma's *The Freedom Struggle in Bhopal State*, both of which rather shamelessly display their author's close identification with the merger movement in the state, rather than giving a balanced analysis of events.[41] An earlier study of Bhopal by local academic, Syed Ashfaq Ali, as well as the recent publication in Urdu, *Rajah Bhoj se Ajtuk ka Bhopal* [A History of Bhopal from Raja Bhoj to the Present], proved to be more useful starting points for this work, since they cover, at least in a cursory fashion, socio-religious, as well as political history.[42] By moving further in this direction, my own work on Bhopal emerges as part of a new trend in historical writing, which highlights the differences between states and the changes that occurred over time, rather than simply dismissing the princes as frivolous reminders of a by-gone age.[43]

Structure, Strategies and Sources

The contents and structure of this study reflect, to a large degree, its focus on a small group of politically active women and the area in which they lived. I have been led by the women themselves into many issues that I had not initially expected to cover, as well as away from certain others. The different levels and realms in which the women of Bhopal operated are reflected in the chapters that follow. The first chapter addresses Muslim women's efforts at an individual level, focusing on their reformist ideas as expressed in theoretical writings and speeches on such topical subjects as gender relations within Islam, purdah, female education

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[40] See, for example, Ian Copland. "'Communalism' in Princely States: The Case of Hyderabad, 1930-1940," *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, 4 (1988), 783-814; Robin Jeffrey. "A Sanctified Label- "Congress" in Travancore Politics, 1938-48" in D.A. Low, ed. *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle 1917-47*. London: Heinemann, 1977, 435-72; and Barbara Ramusack. "Incident at Nabha: Interaction Between Indian States and British Indian Politics," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 28 (1968-9), 563-77.

[41] Mittal, *History of Bhopal State*; and Rajendra Verma. *The Freedom Struggle in Bhopal State: A Gambit in the Transfer of Power*. New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1984. A more objective account of the same period in Hyderabad is V.K. Bawa's *The Last Nizam: The Life & Times of Mir Osman Ali Khan*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992.

[42] Syed Ashfaq Ali. *Bhopal- Past and Present*. Bhopal: Jai Bharat Publishing House, 1970; and H. Majid Husain, ed. *Rajah Bhoj se Ajtuk ka Bhopal*. Bhopal: Urdu Action, 1996. I am grateful to Zakir Husain, Archivist at the NAI(B), for introducing me to this latter work.

[43] Other studies of this type include Vikram Menon's work on Cochin and Travancore, currently being completed at the University of Oxford.

and child marriage. The second chapter moves to the state level, discussing the educational, medical and social facilities that were initiated for women within Bhopal by the ruling Begam and her circle of followers. Chapters three and four emerge on to the national scene, tracing the involvement of Bhopali women, first in all-India movements of social reform, then in overt political movements of both an Indian Muslim and princely nature. In chapter five, a final step is taken to reach the international level, investigating the effect of contact with the Middle East, Great Britain and other Western countries on the Muslim women's reform movement in India. The concluding chapter provides a brief summary of the main themes of the study by looking at the changing position of the women of Bhopal on the veil, as well as the legacy of reforms on the next generation of reformers from the state.

This ordering of chapters also reflects the chronological development that was referred to earlier in the chapter, as it moves from pioneering literary efforts by women that emerged in the earliest years of the twentieth century to more explicitly political events of the late 1920s and beyond. Of course, the need to look at issues thematically has meant that chronology has not been strictly adhered to, either within chapters or throughout the thesis has a whole. However, a more narrative approach has been taken in an attempt to look at each stage of development as an autonomous moment, leading on from earlier history, but unfettered by what subsequently occurred. I have attempted, in Ian Copland's words, "to divorce myself from the tyranny of hindsight,"[44] capturing history as it was experienced by the women who lived it. This, I believe, is one of the most effective means of understanding the specific way in which Muslim women emerged as politicians and social reformers in India in the early twentieth century.

As can be seen from the above outline, this study does not, for the most part, address conventional political issues. Rather, it covers early efforts by Bhopali Muslim women to increase their social and educational rights and opportunities within their society by carving out a role in the public space. Political emergence in a more explicit sense, as it occurred for Indian women after World War I, is not discussed until the later chapters. Nevertheless, a political marker seems appropriate. Women's reform movements, like that which occurred in India, have been defined as "feminist," a distinctly political term, not only by contemporary Western or Westernized authors, but also by early Middle Eastern female activists, like Huda

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[44] Copland, *Princes of India*, 14.

Sha'rawi, who formed the Egyptian Feminist Union (or, in Arabic, al-Ittihad al-Nisa'i al-Misri) in 1923.[45] Indian Muslim women of the same era do not appear to use a comparable term, instead employing less emotive words such as *tahzib* (reform) and *tarbiyat* (uplift) to describe their efforts to improve the status of women. However, they do speak forcibly to their "sisters" (*bahanon*) of the need to assert the "rights of women" (*'aurat ka marataba*) and "ameliorate" (*tarbiyat karna)* the conditions of their sex.[46] Such language strongly suggests the growth of a feminist and, thus, political consciousness.

Furthermore, the participation of Indian Muslim women in early women's reform organizations can be seen as a political act, even though the majority of them shunned any connection with party politics.[47] As Geraldine Forbes has pointed out, autonomous national associations, like the National Council of Women in India and the All-India Women's Conference, taught early female activists important lessons about political organization, democracy and government lobbying.[48] Such benefits were also received through participation in smaller, local organizations, like the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club in Bhopal, as well as wider social and educational movements. It is important to note that many of these 'social reform' movements in which Indian Muslim women took part did, in fact, have an explicitly political agenda. The Muslim University campaign, born at the 1910 meeting of the Muslim League in Delhi and driven by increased communal antagonism after the establishment of the Morley-Minto councils, is a case in point.[49] I, thus, feel justified in referring to the development of the Muslim women's movement in India in the early twentieth century as a 'political emergence.'[50]

The most important sources for this study have been the tracts, books, reports and

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[45] 'Feminism,' in this context, is understood to include a broader range of women's emancipatory activities than is implicit in the definition current with contemporary Western feminists. Agitation on any issue concerning women is included, rather than just conscious efforts to overthrow the exploitative framework of gender relations within the family. The use of such a broad definition has been questioned by some Middle Eastern scholars, including Beth Baron, who feel that the use of the term 'feminist' obscures the wide range of opinions held by early female thinkers. Margot Badran gets beyond this problem, however, by defining different types of feminism, including nationalist feminism, Islamic feminism, imperialist feminism and "everyday" feminism. See Beth Baron. *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994, 6-7; and Badran, *Feminists*, 19-21.

[46] See, for example, Sultan Jahan Begam. *A Scheme for Establishing an "Indian Ladies' Association" at Bhopal.* Bhopal: Qudsia Press, 1916.

[47] The Women's Indian Association, formed in Madras in 1917, was a notable exception.

[48] Geraldine Forbes. "From Purdah to Politics: The Social Feminism of the All-India Women's Organizations" in Papanek and Minault, *Separate Worlds*, 219-242.

[49] Francis Robinson. *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993 (reprint), 200.

[50] I am grateful to Dr. G.R. Hawting at SOAS, London for pushing me to elucidate this point.

letters of Sultan Jahan Begam and the other women of Bhopal.[51] Most of these writings are in Urdu, though certain key texts, like the ruling Begam's three volume autobiography, are available in English translation. On the whole, these sources are deposited in the Oriental and India Office Collection of the British Library, although I also consulted a substantial number of rare books and unpublished manuscripts, including the young Sultan Jahan's diary, as part of the private collection of Princess Abida Sultaan in Karachi, Pakistan. Here, I was also treated to Princess Abida's recollections of her eminent grandmother in the form of lengthy conversations, which I recorded on cassette-tape, and her own unpublished memoirs. These uniquely personal sources not only provided vital insight into major historical events of the period, but also infused my study with a certain human quality, which, I hope, comes across in the chapters that follow.

Also extremely valuable were the essentially untapped Bhopal State Records, which are held in the local branch of the National Archives of India in Bhopal. These records include the annual administrative reports and Political Department files of the Bhopal *durbar*, written in a mixture of *shikasta* Urdu and English, offering a rare internal view of political activities in the state. As women's activism was state-sponsored, the files also contain detailed information on the establishment of schools, clubs, hospitals, exhibitions and associations for women, both within the state and at a national level. An 'inside' view of women's reformist activity was also gained by consulting the official reports of early organizations and institutions. The library of the All-India Women's Conference in New Delhi proved to be particularly useful in this respect, since it contains a nearly complete collection of the organization's publications since its establishment in 1927. In order to 'round out' the official picture, I also used the personal writings of pioneering women activists, like Begam Humayon Mirza of Hyderabad, who wrote detailed descriptions in Urdu of the events surrounding early women's meetings. These narratives provided essential information, not only on the characters of the women involved, but also on the debates that went on behind the scenes.

An important 'external' source on Bhopali women's reformist activity was the Government of India records, most notably, the Bhopal Political Agency files, which appear to have been shifted only recently to the National Archives of India in New Delhi, and the

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[51] This source includes certain articles published in women's journals such as *Stridharma* (Madras), *Tahzib un-Niswan* (Lahore) and *Zil us-Sultan* (Bhopal). However, the patchy nature of available journal collections had led me to rely more heavily on tracts published individually or in special volumes.

Crown Representative records at the India Office in London. The manuscript collections of British officers in India and their wives, as they are preserved in the libraries of the India Office and Cambridge University, also contain memoirs and letters, both official and private, which comment on the early Muslim women's movement. Another valuable British source was the records, publications and private letters of the Quaker missionaries, most of whom were women, who lived and worked in Bhopal state. This archival collection appears to have been hardly touched by scholars of South Asia, despite being preserved in an immaculate condition in Friends' House in London. As the Quakers were largely unfettered by either the imperialist mission or the Begam of Bhopal's political agenda, they were able to assess fairly independently the process of women's reform in the state, as well as the impact of foreign ideas. Together with the wide range of sources described above, this collection has enabled me to piece together the history of Muslim women's political emergence through the lens of the women of Bhopal, discovering that it was as much a story of paradox, as of progress.

A Note on Transliteration

With the exception of the 'ain (') and the hamza (), diacritical marks have been largely omitted from the body of the text. They are only used in the rare case when I have wanted to make a point about pronunciation or they are included in the title of an English text. On the whole, transliteration follows the system used in John T. Platts' *Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English*,[52] for no other reason that it is the dictionary I have always used while learning Urdu and translating texts. I have retained the English spelling of most Indian place names, but personal names have been transliterated according to Platts' system, unless they are well-known in translated or English publications by another spelling. This accounts, for example, for the variation in the spelling of *Sultān*, a common name in Bhopal, between *Sultan* Jahan Begam and Princess Abida *Sultaan*. The Persian izafat has been denoted by '-i-' (as in Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam), while the Arabic definite article, 'al-,' appears as it would be pronounced (i.e. as Zil *us*-Sultan, rather than Zil *al*-Sultan). The only exception is when I am quoting from a source, which does not use this system. On the whole, Urdu and Arabic words have been denoted by italics, unless they are used frequently, as is the case with the terms 'purdah' and 'zenana.'

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[52] John T. Platts. *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī and English*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1988 (reprint). The text was first published in London in 1884.

I: The Literature of Reform

Introduction

A tradition of literature had long existed across the Muslim world that prescribed roles for women in the light of Muhammad's revelation. However, it was not until the nineteenth century that a modern discourse on women's reform emerged in India, which involved a lively debate in the press and included intellectuals from outside the *'ulama*, including a few women. Though this development was precipitated by interaction with the West, it continued to operate within an Islamic framework, making it continuous with earlier intellectual movements within the Muslim community. This evolutionary process was furthered in the early twentieth century by female intellectuals, including those from Bhopal, who began to write and lecture in larger numbers on topical reformist subjects such as gender relations within Islam, purdah, female education and philanthropy. Their individual efforts to produce theoretical works on reform represented the first step towards more widespread political activism by women later in the century.

Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal claimed that it was only with the hope of influencing even one person to reform that she wrote so extensively and revised and published all of her speeches. Prolific she certainly was. In the India Office Library in London, there are over thirty-five major works attributed to her in English and Urdu, and her granddaughter claims that she actually wrote and published more than fifty books.[1] Many of these are of a historical nature, covering the eventful reigns of both her ancestors and herself. Though she did not believe there would be much interest in these writings from the general public, she hoped that they would provide useful lessons on important matters, both public and domestic, to members of her own family. She sought to remind them of their debts to their ancestors, inspire them with tales of great achievements and encourage them to shun activities which had created difficulties for rulers in the past.[2] Most of these volumes were translated into English by European officers in the state, who felt that writings on a unique succession of female Muslim rulers would get a wider readership than the Begam expected.

Many of the remaining works written by Sultan Jahan are on various reformist topics applicable to Muslim women, including education, child welfare, domestic economy, gender relations, hygiene and religion. They were written and published in Urdu, though certain ones

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[1] Abida Sultaan. "The Begums of Bhopal," *History Today*, 30 (Oct., 1980), 35.

[2] Sultan Jahan Begam. *An Account of My Life*. Vol. I. Tr. by C.H. Payne. London: John Murray, 1910, 1-2.

were translated into English, in a style which made them accessible to other Muslim women throughout India. While some of these works are short tracts, others are in the form of manuals, collections of speeches and allegorical stories. One of her most popular works, *Bagh-i-'Ajib* [Fables of the Magic Garden], is of this last genre. It uses allegorical stories, in verse and prose, of plants, vegetables and flowers to provide moral and religious instruction to the young.[3] In contrast, many of her other tracts display a thorough knowledge of Islamic learning, including the Qur'an, *fiqh* and *hadith*, giving her writing a distinctly academic feel, though she maintained she was not a great scholar.[4]

Most available publications from Bhopal state were written by its female ruler, but there are a few speeches and writings by other women of the state. Though members of the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club at Bhopal were encouraged to write and give speeches,(see chapter II) it appears that few of them have survived, except those presented by members of the ruling family and high-ranking women officials.[5] Of these, most are written by Sultan Jahan Begam's third and favourite daughter-in-law, Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam, who had been raised under her own careful tutelage from the age of five. Though her bibliography is impressive, including several books on Islamic history and complicated lectures on hygiene and other topics,[6] her opinions, as well as those of her fellow daughters-in-law, are somewhat indistinguishable from those of her great patron. Shah Bano Begam acknowledged at the beginning of many of her speeches that Sultan Jahan had endowed her with all of her guidance and training, provided her with all of the literary works necessary to write her lecture, and personally taken the time to help her "improve" it.[7] As a result, it is hardly surprising that the young girl had internalized the ideals of her powerful mother-in-law.

Other women of the state were similarly awed by the 'larger than life' presence of the Nawab Begam of Bhopal. Whether members of her own family or visitors from outside of

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[3] This text was written in three parts, which were reprinted numerous times. A complete version is: Sultan Jahan Begam. *Bagh-i-'Ajib*. (parts 1, 2 & 3). Bhopal: Hamidia Art Press, 1924.

[4] See, for example, Sultan Jahan Begam. *Sabil ul-Jinan*. Bhopal: Ruler of Bhopal, 1917; and *Sirat-i-Mustafa*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1919.

[5] "A Brief Decennial Report of "The Princess of Wales Ladies' Club," Bhopal" in *A Brief Decennial Report of "The Princess of Wales Ladies' Club," Bhopal*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1922, 7.

[6] See Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam. *Silk-i-Marwarid*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1917 (A collection of anecdotes on moral individuals in Islamic history); *Zikr-i-Mubarak*. Bhopal: Muhammad Mahdi, 1918 (A biography of the Prophet); *Khilafat-i-Rashidah*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1919 (A history of the orthodox caliphate); and *Hamari Rah ka Ghar*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1921 (An account of the human body).

[7] "Maimoona Sultan's First Lecture on Hygiene" and "Maimoona Sultan's Second Lecture on Hygiene" in *Decennial Report*, 56, 61.

the state, educated or 'unprotected' women depended on her for emotional and financial support. These women, who often faced prejudice in a conservative society, found that Bhopal provided a 'safe haven' where they could receive stipends or respected government positions to pursue education or other efforts for women's emancipation. They returned the favour by working unceaselessly for Sultan Jahan Begam's projects and showing her unbounded respect. If they did not, they could find themselves without a patron and banned from the state.[8] This state of affairs was noted by Lady Reading on her visit to Bhopal in 1923; she remarked that the women who lived on the Begam's "bounty," all appeared to be "trembling at her frown."[9] The Vicereine's Private Secretary, Miss Fitzroy, recorded that the Begam herself expected unquestioned support from her dependents; while visiting the Ladies' Club with Lady Reading, the Begam reportedly commented, "What I do tell them, they do- and they are very happy!"[10]

Thus, it seems that, out of both fear and admiration, the women of Bhopal, like the rest of the Begam's subjects, rarely, if ever, publicly challenged, or even varied from, her views in their own writings. The latter consideration- admiration- should not be under-valued. Her pioneering efforts for women's education and reform were constantly eulogized, with sincerity, in speeches and articles throughout India.[11] Within Bhopal, the identities of the extremely learned women that gathered around the personage of the Begam, including Sarojini Naidu, the Faizi sisters of Bombay, and Abru Begam and Fatima Arzu Begam, sisters of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, suggest the respect she garnered as an educationalist and author. This regard can also be seen in the importance that some of these articulate women granted to her words, above their own; Abru Begam, for example, preferred to edit the works of Sultan Jahan, rather than privilege her own voice.[12] Of course, the women who gathered in Bhopal cannot all be simply dismissed as sycophants or mere followers; Sarojini Naidu was

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[8] Atiya Faizi, for example, of the Tyabji family of Bombay, was banned from entering Bhopal in the early 1920s after angering the ruling Begam. Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 29 Oct., 1995.

[9] Letter from Alice, Lady Reading to family in England, 22 Feb., 1923, IOL, Lady Reading Papers, MSS.Eur.E.316/3/#8.

[10] Loose papers of the diary of Yvonne Alice Gertrude Fitzroy, Private Secretary to Lady Reading, 1921-25, 19 Feb., 1923, IOL, Fitzroy Papers, MSS.Eur.E.318/8. The strange construction of this sentence suggests Sultan Jahan Begam's less than perfect knowledge of English.

[11] See, for example, the speech of Begam 'Abdullah at the opening of a boarding house at the Aligarh Girls' School in Shaikh Muhammad 'Abdullah, ed. *Riport ijlas-i-awwal All India Muslim Ladies' Conference mun'aqidah ba-maqam-i-'Aligarh ba-mah-i-March 1914*. Aligarh: Institute Press, 1915, 11-19.

[12] Abru Begam, ed. *Rahbar-i-Akhlaq*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1922, i. Another example was Mrs. G. Baksh, a well educated Christian woman, who was the superintendent of the Sultania Girls' School and edited *Silk-i-Shahwar*. Bhopal: Ruler of Bhopal, 1919.

a renowned poet, orator and political leader in her own right, as is well known, while the Faizi sisters were regular contributors to journals, books and women's organizations.[13] The effect of their separate influence on local Bhopali women will be charted in the chapters that follow.

Many of the reformist tracts and collections of speeches written by the women of Bhopal were published in the state. Various printing presses had existed in Bhopal before this time; as well as presses for government publications, Shah Jahan Begam had instituted a press, under her own name, intended to promote education by printing school texts, literary books and newspapers.[14] During the reign of Sultan Jahan, the preeminent printing press was the Sultania Press, which published the state gazette, government orders and works sanctioned by the ruler- the majority of which she wrote. Private presses were prohibited in the state, but other government presses, including the Hamidia Art Press, also existed for specialist printing. Around five hundred tracts were generally printed at a time, many of which were distributed to libraries and institutions in reformist centres throughout India. This potentially gave them a wide readership among middle- and upper-class Muslim women.[15] But these writings were only a few of the many which were being published by Muslims in the early twentieth century. Their importance can be seen by placing them within the context of the reformist discourse of the time.

The Reformist Discourse of Indian Muslims

Most scholarship on Muslim reformist literature in India and the Middle East has tended to focus on a few well-known male authors such as Nazir Ahmad in India and Qasim Amin in Egypt. As Beth Baron has pointed out in the Middle Eastern context, such a limited focus has distorted Muslim intellectual history, since it has led to the marginalization of women writers and other less prominent thinkers, who played an important

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[13] After completing her education abroad, Sarojini Naidu distinguished herself, first, as a poet and orator, then as a leader of the Indian National Congress. Throughout her political career, she also campaigned actively for women's rights to education, franchise and divorce. For an overview of her social and political ideas, see Verinder Grover and Ranjana Arora, eds. *Sarojini Naidu*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1993. Belonging to the renowned Bombay merchant family, the Faizi sisters played an active role in the movement for Muslim women's reform, abandoning their veils, organizing national women's meetings and exhibitions, and writing extensively in Urdu journals for women. For examples of their reformist views, as advanced in *Tahzib un-Niswan* (Lahore), *Khatun* (Aligarh) and *'Ismat* (Delhi), see Ali, *Emergence*, ch. 6.

[14] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, 89.

[15] See the government *List of Publications* for Bhopal state, 1924-1929, IOL, RR/ZY. Even now, the library of the Women's College at Aligarh holds a remarkable collection of the writings of Sultan Jahan Begam. See Geraldine Forbes. "Libraries, Archives and Other Resources in India for the Study of Women" in Carol Sakala. *Women in South Asia: A Guide to Resources*. New York: Kraus International Publications, 1980, 435.

role in the early debate on women's rights.[16] Recognizing this imbalance, the most recent academic work in the field has attempted to recover the voices of forgotten women and men by looking at early women's journals and other publications. By drawing on these new studies, as well as earlier work on more established figures, this section intends to provide a more complete picture of the reformist discourse of Indian Muslims in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the late nineteenth century, *ashraf* Muslims of the subcontinent experienced a growing fear of losing their religious identity when faced with foreign rule and a 'sea of infidels.' In seeking accommodation with the new British rulers, they took some solace from the knowledge that the real strength of Islam lay in the stability of the domestic sphere- an area outside the purview of the government. Early reformers, like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, created an essential dichotomy between the 'outer' world of men, which must accept Western rule and science and progress, and the 'inner' world of women, which was ruled by God and must not be changed.[17] This ideology resulted in Sayyid Ahmad's seemingly contradictory policy of accepting Western learning and notions of progress, while remaining opposed to female education, beyond the teaching of religious knowledge within the home. He informed the Education Commission of 1882 that there was no method by which the government could convince "respectable" Muslims to send their girls to school, nor should they attempt to develop "satisfactory education" for females, until "a large number of Muhammadan males [have] receive[d] a sound education."[18]

Sayyid Ahmad believed that Muslim culture could effectively resist being corrupted by both colonialism and Hinduism by insulating the private sphere from the degenerate influences of the public domain. For this, the maintenance of purdah, or seclusion, was critical. It permitted women to remain entirely focussed on household chores and religion, creating the home as an 'oasis' of tradition for their menfolk. On top of this, purdah was a symbol of the integrity of the Muslim community, distinguishing Indian Muslims from their

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[16] Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 4.

[17] Ayesha Jalal. "The Convenience of Subservience: Women and the State of Pakistan" in Deniz Kandiyoti, ed. *Women, Islam and the State*. London: MacMillan Press, 1991, 80-81. This argument was succinctly made by Partha Chatterji in reference to Hindu nationalism in Bengal in "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989, 233-253.

[18] *Appendix to Education Commission Report*. Calcutta, 1884, 299-300, cited in Mirza, *Muslim Women's Role in the Pakistan Movement*, 7.

fellow countrymen.[19] Though many of his contemporaries began to question the strictness of the purdah system, often as a result of their Western education, he remained a firm advocate of the practice until his death, asserting, "I consider the purdah which is customary among the Muslim women to be the best we can have."[20]

Other reformers of the era also realized that women had a vital role to play in the maintenance of culture, since they were responsible for training children and passing on religious knowledge and customs. But, unlike Sayyid Ahmad, they felt it necessary to put a greater focus on women's status and education. Already, the British rulers and reformist Hindus had seized on women's issues, making the 'Women's Question' a central concern in the controversial debates on social reform. As early as 1826, James Mill had published *The History of British India*, in which he decreed that the position of women was an indicator of a society's development: "Among rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted." From his (second-hand) knowledge of India, he concluded that women were held in "habitual contempt," a state which suggested the backwardness of the country.[21]

Throughout the nineteenth century, Hindu reformers, the most prominent being Raja Rammohun Roy in Bengal and Swami Dayananda Saraswati in Punjab, responded in force. Though they admitted that women were presently in a depressed condition, they condemned Mill's formulation of Hindu civilization as eternally degraded, instead arguing that there had once been a 'golden age' when women were accorded value and respect. Before 'the fall,' normally attributed to Muslim rule, women were portrayed as educated and free, playing an active role in the social and political life of the community, unfettered by seclusion or child marriage.[22] It was necessary, the reformers maintained, to institute change and return to this glorious past, which was free from 'evil' customs. To bolster their argument, they claimed that *sati*, child marriage and polygamy were actually against the dictates of nature and reason, evoking the rationalist language of the British administrators.[23]

Muslim reformers modified these arguments to their own purposes, calling for a revitalization of Muslim culture through the restoration of 'pure' Islam, free from cultural

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[19] Jalal, "The Convenience of Subservience," 81.
[20] Quoted in M.S. Jain. *The Aligarh Movement: Its Origins and Development, 1858-1906*. Agra: Sri Ram Mehra & Co., 1965, 109.
[21] James Mill. *The History of British India*. 2 vols. New York: Chelsea House, 1968 (reprint), 309-10.
[22] Uma Chakravarti. "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?" in Sangari and Vaid, *Recasting Women*, 38.
[23] Geraldine Forbes. *Women in Modern India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 17.

accretions. This, in effect, meant a return to scriptural sources and early Islamic history. This revivalism had the greatest consequences for women, who were discovered to be backward and superstitious, ignorant of scriptural Islam and even the basic tenets of their religion- hardly good companions for the new generation of educated men. Particularly, male reformers complained that Muslim women were dedicated to rituals and customs, which were expensive and rarely related to their own faith, including exorcism, vows to spirits, idol worship and life-cycle ceremonials.[24] Increasingly, they began advocating a changed role for women, to be achieved through specific moral and practical education. This would enable women to become better wives, mothers, homemakers and Muslims, more prepared to fulfil traditional roles, guide their children and protect their faith from the challenges of alien rule.[25] Muslim reformers throughout the Islamic world, including Muhammad 'Abduh in Egypt and Sultan 'Abdul 'Aziz in Turkey, were articulating nearly identical arguments at this time.[26]

In order to spread their views, Muslim reformers of the late nineteenth century utilized the new print technology introduced by the British, publishing numerous short tracts, journals, manuals and novels. As Francis Robinson has investigated, the growth of print culture was a development that was strongly resisted by Indian Muslims before this time, since the very idea of mass-produced printed books conflicted with Islamic beliefs about the exclusive and personal nature of knowledge. It was only when the Muslim elite was stripped of political power that the *'ulama* adopted printing as a "necessary weapon" against the colonial ruler, Christian missionaries and other threats to Islam. Of course, this acceptance of print technology had important effects for the Muslim community. As knowledge was no longer controlled by the *'ulama*, new religious ideas began to emerge from thinkers, like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who had not received formal training in the Islamic sciences. They pioneered new trends in historical understanding, as has been seen above, as well as the popularization of literary forms, like the biography and the novel, which placed greater emphasis on the individual.[27]

Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi, one of the earliest Muslim reformers, successfully adopted the popular medium of the novel as a means of propagating traditional women's education. In

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[24] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 67.
[25] Minault, *Voices of Silence*, 14.
[26] Kumari Jayawardena. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. London: Zed Books, 1986, 28, 50.
[27] Francis Robinson. "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print," *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 1 (1993), 229-251.

Mir'at ul-'Arus [The Bride's Mirror], first published in 1869, he told the story of two sisters, Akbari and Asghari, who, in temperament and ability, were in complete contrast. Akbari, the elder, was illiterate, ill-natured and idle, while her younger sister, Asghari, who had been educated at home, was clever, compassionate, respectful and hard-working. In the course of the novel, Asghari proves herself to be the ideal of the reformed woman: not only does she uncover a dishonest servant, find her husband good employment, arrange a suitable marriage for her sister-in-law and start a school in her home for respectable girls, but she also observes purdah, advocates arranged marriages and always remains loyal to her husband and family.[28] It was these latter qualities, which made her education and independent action acceptable.

Mir'at ul-'Arus was published after winning the top prize in a competition organized by the Lieutenant-Governor of the North Western Provinces, William Muir, for "useful" literature in the vernacular on social problems affecting women. Though it was the most well-known and long-standing book to win a prize, it was far from the only one, as the offer of financial reward stimulated a large number of writers to turn their attention to reformist topics. The prize-winning entries varied widely in quality, but most advocated, as Nazir Ahmad did, that women be provided with some religious and domestic training, either in the home or private *zenana* schools, so that they could better fulfil their 'natural' duties. In reflection of the new historical consciousness, they also included sketches of famous Muslim women from the first decade of Islam, as well as their contemporary, Shah Jahan Begam of Bhopal, whose management and other domestic skills were to be imitated. Many such works, including Inayat Husain's *Mufid-i-Khala'iq* [Benefits to the People] (1869), Muhammad Muslihuddin's *Kuhl-ul-Jawahir* [Chemistry of the Pearls] (1873) and 'Abdul Rahim Khan's *Chasma-i-Khirad* [The Spring of Wisdom] (1876), were adopted as text-books in girls' schools in British India and the Muslim princely states.[29]

Mir'at ul-'Arus and Nazir Ahmad's other three novels on women[30] also joined the

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[28] Muhammad Nazir Ahmed. *Mir'at ul-'Arus*. Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Press, 1896 (reprint). It was translated into English by G.E. Ward as *The Bride's Mirror*. London: Henry Frowde, 1903. For a discussion of the book, see C.M. Naim. "Prize-Winning *Adab*: A Study of Five Urdu Books Written in Response to the Allahabad Government Gazette Notification" in Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed. *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 299-314; and Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 31-32.

[29] Naim, "Prize-Winning *Adab*," 290-294; and Ali, *Emergence*, 42-55.

[30] These include the sequel to *Mir'at ul-'Arus*, entitled *Banat un-Na's* [The Daughters of the Bier], which focusses on the school that Asghari established. The girl students are described learning the Qur'an and other religious books, as well as cooking, sewing, domestic management and the making of handicrafts. The other two novels, *Muhsinat* [The Chaste Woman] and *Ayama* [Widows], describe the evil effects of polygamy and the prohibition of widow remarriage. Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 326.

syllabus of Urdu girls' schools, although they were proscribed by Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's manual for the reform of Muslim women, *Bihishti Zewar* [Heavenly Ornaments], written at the beginning of the twentieth century. Thanawi, a distinguished *'alim* of the Deoband school, sought to provide, in this book, the complete education necessary for a respectable Muslim woman. In meticulous detail, he describes how to read, write letters, cook, care for the sick, manage the household, perform simple religious duties and many other mundane activities. Although he makes no distinction between the moral or intellectual capabilities of men and women,- both sexes are instructed to read religious texts in Arabic and follow the example of the Prophet- he continues to stress the maintenance of an earthly hierarchy, in which a person has distinct roles based on gender, age and status.[31] Barbara Metcalf postulates that it is because Nazir Ahmad's female characters learn "cosmopolitan" subjects like geography and history, play with dolls, take example from Englishwomen, read Urdu newspapers and generally display more ability and fortitude than the male characters, thus deviating from the ideal family hierarchy, that Thanawi rejects them.[32]

In 1874, the poet, Altaf Husain Hali, published *Majalis un-Nisa* [Assemblies of Women] and, in the words of Gail Minault, the book's recent translator, "another female Muslim paragon" was born. Though Hali was friendly with Sayyid Ahmad, discussing ideas of reform and contributing to his journal, *Tahzib ul-Akhlaq* [Moral Reform], his views on women's education were far more advanced. The ability of his heroine, Zubaida Khatun, having been taught the Qur'an, calligraphy, Persian and Urdu by her father and domestic sciences by her mother, to overcome numerous obstacles in the way of her family's happiness makes her an articulate proponent of female education. She is prudent, yet pious, conserving the family's resources by eschewing expensive rituals and customs, including dowry, which are not in keeping with textual Islam. Following her marriage, she turns her attention to inculcating her son, Sayyid Abbas, with the same virtues. The second part of the story documents his many successes in life, which result, not from family ties or influential alliances, but diligence, sagacity and resourcefulness. The message is clear: educated mothers play an essential role in the regeneration of the Muslim community, not only by reforming the household, but also by producing progressive sons.[33]

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[31] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 2.
[32] Metcalf, "Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī and Urdu literature," 98-99.
[33] Minault, *Voices of Silence*, 3-30. This theme was reiterated in Hali's poem, *Chup ki Dad* [Homage to the Silent], first published in *Khatun* (Aligarh) in 1905. It is translated into English in Minault, *Voices of Silence*, 141-150.

Yet, like his contemporaries, Hali maintained an essentially traditional approach to women's rights; there was no mention in his work of higher education for women, the introduction of a Western curriculum or a reduction in purdah observance. It was not until the last decade of the nineteenth century that a few pioneers began to put forward more radical ideas. Sayyid Amir 'Ali's *The Spirit of Islam*, first published in 1891, represents one of the earliest 'modernist' interpretations of Islam. Not only did he discourage polygamy and 'triple *talaq*' divorces, but he also spoke with disdain of the "in-elastic" purdah set-up in India, claiming that strict seclusion was a remnant of the pre-Islamic age of ignorance. He argued that women should be given their full legal rights, as set out in the Qur'an, as well as freedom, observed in the lives of 'Aisha and Fatima, to take part in public life. Though he felt "privacy" was necessary to protect the female sex, he asserted that the only effect of complete segregation was to prevent women from having an "ennobling, purifying and humanising influence on men's minds."[34] Printed in English, this book seemed to elicit little reaction in India, though it was popular in England.

Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali's revolutionary treatise in Urdu, *Huquq un-Niswan* [The Rights of Women], though greeted with revulsion when it was read as a manuscript by his friend, Sayyid Ahmad, similarly made little impact when it was published in 1898. This work was unprecedented in its egalitarian approach to gender relations; though Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali conceded that men and women were distinct biologically, he rejected this difference as a basis for male superiority. Rather, he claimed that a husband and wife should get along in a spirit of "sympathy and companionship," a condition which eliminated the possibility of child marriage. He also argued that the survival of Muslim civilization depended on women reaching their highest intellectual potential. If women were not fully educated, then children would not receive adequate training and men would go astray in their search for camaraderie, thus debasing the family and the whole of society. He also contended that the Qur'an did not imply that women should cover their faces or be kept in strict seclusion, but instead advocated "inspired modesty." Like earlier works, his tract also censured wasteful customs, stressing the need to follow Islamic injunctions.[35] The lack of response to this work, as well as to that

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[34] Syed Ameer Ali. *The Life and Teachings of Mohammed or The Spirit of Islam*. London: W.H. Allen & Co. Ltd, 1891, 316-365. This book was based on an earlier work, entitled *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1873. The later work, however, is more definitive, having expanded the chapter on women considerably.

[35] Minault, "Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and 'Huquq un-Niswan,'" 147-172.

of Amir 'Ali, suggests that the movement for women's rights amongst Indian Muslims had slowed in comparison with that in Egypt, where Qasim Amin's comparable work, *Tahrir ul-Mara*, was greeted with a furore of debate when in was published the following year.[36]

More popular in India were the best-selling, tear-jerking novels of Rashid ul-Khairi, published in the first decade of the twentieth century. Like his uncle, Nazir Ahmad, Rashid ul-Khairi composed stories about women with the theme of social reform, but his plots are more melodramatic and his heroines more tortured. Despite their education, thrift, piety, modesty and charity, they inevitably contract an unhappy marriage, die at an early age or are maltreated by their relatives. In spite of their misfortune, they rarely murmur a complaint, remain dedicated to their families and continue to spread the reformist message. Rashid ul-Khairi was particularly attracted to the 'good sister-bad sister' motif, utilizing it both in his celebrated trilogy, *Subh-i-zindagi* [The Morning of Life], *Sham-i-zindagi* [The Evening of Life] and *Shab-i-zindagi* [The Nighttime of Life], and later novels. In *Jauhar-i-qadamat* [A Jewel of Great Value], it was effectively employed to attack slavish imitation of the West; the 'modern' girl, Shahida is portrayed as brazen, selfish, superficial and, ultimately, lonely and miserable, while her sister, Zahida, a simple, charitable and long-suffering character, essentially remains content.[37] Rashid ul-Khairi's aversion to Westernization placed him in conflict with contemporaneous reformers in Turkey, like 'Abdullah Cevdet, Halil Hamit and Ahmet Agaoglu, who identified women's emancipation with Europeanization.[38]

As Minault points out, one of the prominent features of Rashid ul-Khairi's publications is his stress on women's modesty and submissiveness. He, like other male reformers, viewed women as objects to be reformed, not as active participants in their own regeneration. Yet, by the turn of the century, women had joined their male counterparts in the production of literature, publishing a variety of works, some of which included a reformist message.[39] Women such as Wahid Jahan Begam, wife of Shaikh 'Abdullah, and Muhammadi Begam, wife

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[36] For the debate surrounding Qasim Amin's work, see Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, ch. 8.

[37] These novels, as well as some of his many others, are discussed in Minault, "*'Ismat*," 93-100. Several other authors have also written on his stories, including Shaista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardy (known more commonly after her marriage as Begam Ikramullah) in *A Critical Survey of the Development of the Urdu Novel and Short Story*. London: Longmans & Co., 1945, 105-122.

[38] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 30-33.

[39] It has been estimated that, in the context of Bengal, approximately 190 women generated around 400 works between 1856 and 1910, including "poems, novels, plays, essays and auto-biographies." Sumanta Banerjee. "Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal" in Sangari and Vaid, *Recasting Women*, 160.

of Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali, began to participate in the struggle for women's reform by editing, in conjunction with their husbands, and contributing to a wide range of women's magazines. In doing this, they followed the path of Muslim women in the Middle East, who had began to publish journals and novels from the early 1890s,[40] as well as Indian women from other communities.[41] The first journals for Indian Muslim women, *Akhbar un-Nisa* (Delhi) and *Mu'allim-i-Niswan* (Hyderabad), were published from the 1880s, but it was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that journals began to appear in the United Provinces and Punjab to which women themselves contributed. These included *Tahzib un-Niswan* (Lahore, 1898), *Khatun* (Aligarh, 1904) and *'Ismat* (Delhi, 1908). Due to their success, Muslim women's journals soon proliferated across India, providing a forum for women's public self-expression, not only in Urdu, but also in Bengali and other regional languages. Some of the more prominent of these publications included "Zenana Mahafil" in *Saogat* (Calcutta), *Purdahnashin* (Agra), *Sharif Bibi* (Lahore), *Zil us-Sultan* (Bhopal) and *un-Nisa* (Hyderabad).

The fledgling female writers, nearly always encouraged by their fathers or husbands, wrote for purdah-bound middle- and upper-class women, who, like themselves, were literate in Urdu, but lacked intellectual stimulation and connections outside their homes. Their articles provided useful reading material for other newly educated women on a diverse selection of topics, including female education, women's rights in Islam, health, nutrition, home economics and gardening, yet never challenged conventional attitudes to purdah restrictions or women's place in the family. It was only in the 1920s, when educational opportunities for women became more widespread, that the style and content of women's journals began to evolve in a more explicitly feminist direction. Though still dominated by domestic issues, they began to run articles by more radical female intellectuals, including Atiya Faizi, Sughra Humayon Mirza and Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, that articulated demands for female suffrage, legislative reform, economic independence, 'love' marriages and even the relaxation of purdah. At the same time, news pieces on women's organizations, contemporary politics and travel became regular features, reflecting elite women's increased involvement in activities

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[40] *Al-Fatah*, the first women's journal to which Muslim women contributed, appeared in Egypt in 1892. By 1901, there were already two women's journals, *al-Mar'a* and *Shajarat al-Durr*, that were edited by Muslim women in Egypt. In Turkey, Fatima Aliye published two novels on women's reform, *Muhadarat* [Womanhood] and *Nisvani Islam* [Islamic Women] in the early 1890s, after which Muslim women began to contribute to women's journals with the founding of *A Newspaper for Women* in 1895. Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 16-22; and Naila Minai. *Women in Islam*. London: John Murray, 1981, 52-54.

[41] Methodist missionaries, in conjunction with Indian Christian women, had founded the first Indian women's newspaper, *Rafiq-i-Niswan*, in 1884. Ali, *Emergence*, 59.

outside the home.[42]

Certain Muslim women of the early twentieth century not only supplied short pieces for journals, but also wrote longer works, including novels, manuals and reports. Muhammadi Begam, editor of *Tahzib un-Niswan*, was particularly prolific and successful. As well as making a significant contribution to women's journalism, she also published several reformist novels, a manual on "modern" housekeeping and a book detailing the etiquette of social gatherings. These last two books, entitled *Khanadari* and *Adab-i-Mulaqat*, provided especially valuable information to Muslim ladies of the *ashraf* class, who had only recently begun running 'modern' homes and socializing outside the family circle. Muhammadi Begam herself was considered to be an ideal of the 'new' Muslim woman; though she remained in purdah, she successfully completed her education, assisted her husband in his work and managed a home and family, before her premature death in 1908. Despite her short life, she was able to introduce a feminine sensibility to Urdu literature for women that was not present in the earlier novels of Nazir Ahmad and Hali. In *Safiya Begam*, for instance, she creates a character, who is not only educated and competent, like Asghari, but also limited by family duties and moral choices.[43]

Another important woman author of the period was Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, an educationalist from Bengal. Her writings represent a significant departure from accepted norms and the emergence of a more explicitly feminist consciousness. In *Sultana's Dream*, a utopian work written in English, she satirizes Muslim society for keeping women strictly secluded, stripped of power and deprived of scientific knowledge, factors to which she attributed India's backward state. In *Avarodhbasini* [The Secluded Ones], a collection of factual anecdotes, she again exposes both the ridiculous and tragic effects of the inflexible purdah system prevalent in India, expressing concern for women of all economic classes, not just her own.[44] Fellow Muslims reacted to Begam Rokeya's tales of purdah with shock, embarrassment and, ultimately, outrage. They claimed that she had been influenced by foreign ideas and was publicizing matters which ought to have been kept private. Although her writings, like those of Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali, provided inspiration for a later generation, her

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[42] Urdu journalism for women has been discussed by Gail Minault in several publications, including "Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali and *Tahzīb un-Niswān*," 179-199; "*'Ismat*," 93-100; "Urdu Women's Magazines," 2-9; and *Secluded Scholars*, ch. 3. The topic has also been addressed by Azra Asghar Ali in *The Emergence of Feminism*, ch. 6. For a comparative study on Egypt, see Baron, *Women's Awakening*.

[43] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 114-118.

[44] Hossain, *Sultana's Dream and Selections from the Secluded Ones*, 7-18, 24-36.

radical ideas were far from popular in her own lifetime and had to be significantly toned down before girls of conservative families would attend her schools.[45]

The examples of these two early female authors suggest the importance for women of their generation of building on socially accepted traditions, rather than attacking patriarchy directly. The revolutionary writings of Begam Rokeya and certain male authors, like Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali and Sayyid Amir 'Ali, were unable to effect change in the wider Muslim community of the early twentieth century, as they strongly challenged traditions which were felt to distinguish and protect Muslim society. By emphasizing female respectability and religious devotion, other women writers, including Muhammadi Begam, were able to participate successfully in the reformist discourse, which had been initiated by men such as Hali and Nazir Ahmad, influencing Muslim public opinion and gradually improving the position of Indian Muslim women. The development of reformist thought by women will be investigated in more detail later in the chapter by looking at the extensive theoretical writings and speeches by the women of Bhopal during the reign of Sultan Jahan Begam. First, however, the discussion will turn to the history of writing in Bhopal state, including in the style of reform, before she came to power.

The History of Writing in Bhopal State

In her autobiography, Sultan Jahan Begam claims that, before the treaty of friendship was signed with the British in 1818, the nobles of the court took no interest in science or literature, instead caring only for the arts of war; as she states poetically, "the pen, by comparison with the sword, was reckoned a thing of very small account."[46] According to more recent academic research, the nawabs, diwans and jagirdars of Bhopal did patronize numerous poets and theologians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In particular, Chhote Khan, Diwan during the reign of Nawab Hayat Muhammad Khan, was renowned for his generosity to "men of letters," attracting many scholars to the state from other areas in India. In the early nineteenth century, Nawab Jahangir Muhammad Khan and his wife-successor, Sikandar Begam are similarly remembered both for their patronage of literary figures, including Ghalib, and their own contributions to creative writing.[47] However, it was

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[45] Hossain, *Rokeya*, 135.

[46] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. I, 2.

[47] Salim Hamid Rizvi. "A Brief Survey of the Contribution of Bhopal to the Development of Urdu Literature" in Ali, *Bhopal*, ap. 12. One of Jahangir's courtiers, Mirza Mahmud Beg Rahat, later received a nominal prize from

not until the reign of Shah Jahan Begam, in the latter half of that century, that Urdu literature and poetry really flourished in Bhopal.

The Begam was very fond of poetry, and offered substantial state pensions to the men of learning who gathered at her court, the most distinguished being Amir Minai, author of *Amir-i-Lughat*. Of particular interest, however, is her patronage of a circle of female poets. These gifted women included Hasanara Begam 'Namkeen', author of a *diwan* and two prose publications, Munawwar Jahan Begam and Musharraf Jahan Begam, the daughters of Nawab Mustafa Khan 'Shefta', and several others.[48] Shah Jahan Begam also composed poems herself, under the pen-names 'Shirin' and 'Tajrur', and two *diwans*, entitled *Taj ul-Kalam* and *Diwan-i-Shirin*, are attributed to her. A third volume of her poetry, entitled *Sidq ul-Bayan*, describes aspects of ancient India, including various festivals and battles.[49] Though poetry was her passion, she also supervised the compilation of *Khizanat ul-Lughat*, a mammoth dictionary of select terms in Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, English and Turkish.[50] Perhaps, her best known work, however, was *Taj ul-Iqbal Tarikh-i-Bhopal* [The History of Bhopal], as it was translated into English and, like the works of her daughter, presented to all eminent guests to the state.[51]

Though not as well-known outside of India, the most extraordinary of Shah Jahan Begam's writings, in the context of this discussion, is *Tahzib un-Niswan* (also known as *Tarbiat ul-Aftal*) [The Women's Reformer], a 475-page manual for women, first published in 1889, nearly two decades before Thanawi's comparable *Bihishti Zewar*. It was written in a simple style, which made it accessible to most Urdu-speaking women, and, as a result, it was extremely popular, being reprinted several times. Considered the first women's encyclopedia in India, the volume covers a wide variety of topics relating to women's work in the household and their status in Islam. Unlike Thanawi's *Bihishti Zewar*, which stresses the subordinate position of women in the family, *Tahzib un-Niswan* attempts to give women some control over their own lives by teaching them about pregnancy, child-rearing and hygiene, as well as marriage, divorce and other ceremonies within Islam. It provides simple remedies for

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the government of the North Western Provinces for his reformist work, *Nata'ij ul-ma'ani* [Conclusions (full of) intrinsic qualities]. Naim, "Prize-winning *Adab*," 294-295.

[48] Rizvi, "Brief Survey," ap. 12.

[49] Sultan Jahan was rather scathing of these literary efforts of her mother, claiming that she could not have actually written all the poems, as she did not have the time or the patience. She also questioned why she had written the last work in verse when it would have been clearer in prose! Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, 241-243.

[50] Shah Jahan Begam, compiled by order of. *Khizanat ul-Lughat*. Bhopal, 1886.

[51] See Shah Jahan Begam, *Tāj-ul Ikbāl*.

common illnesses, offers advice on dress-making and cookery, suggests decorating techniques for the home, and even provides instruction on jewellery-making and needlework.[52]

It was Shah Jahan's interest in poetry and scholarship that attracted her to her second husband, Siddiq Hasan Khan, a prominent member of the Ahl-i-Hadith movement. This reformist sect vehemently condemned other schools of Islam, which followed established law books or permitted culturally specific practices, asserting that the Qur'an and *hadith* were the religion's only sources of authority. Born of a respected, but poor family, Siddiq Hasan Khan proved himself to be an impassioned intellectual and prolific writer, publishing, with the assistance of the Begam, over 180 works in Urdu, Arabic and Persian, intended to advance his reformist ideals throughout India and the Middle East.[53] Several of his pamphlets, the most prominent being *Diwan ul-Khutub ul-Sanat ul-Kamila*, were considered by British officials to promote *jihad*, or religious warfare, against the foreign overlord. These "seditious" writings, coming as they did from the consort of an important Muslim ruler, evoked extensive comment in government department files, and it was eventually deemed necessary to punish Siddiq Hasan Khan for his "disloyalty" by depriving him of his titles and official responsibilities. Nevertheless, his works continued to be published and circulated outside of the state, gaining him further influence and prestige in Muslim reformist circles.[54]

Sultan Jahan Begam strongly disapproved of both court poetry and her step-father's subversive writings, preferring works on 'modern' topics such as science, history and ethics, which would find favour with the paramount power. Though traditional poets continued to emerge from Bhopal during her administration, it was historians and social scientists, like Muhammad Amin Zuberi and Abdur Rahman Bijnori, who received the patronage of the state. As employees of the *Daftar Tarikh* (History Office), these authors favourably recorded events in the reign of their illustrious employer and the earlier history of Bhopal, work which reflects the growth of historical consciousness and the desire to create an 'authentic' Indian

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[52] Shah Jahan Begam. *Tahzib-i-Niswan*. Delhi: Matbah Ansari, 1889. Not surprisingly, Sultan Jahan reacted to this practical reformist book with more regard than she did to her mother's poems. Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, 244-245.

[53] According to Saeedullah, the Nawab-consort's biographer, many of these works include extensive excerpts from other works, which accounts, to some degree, for the large number of publications. They were not only printed in Bhopal, but also elsewhere in India and the Middle East. *The Life and Works of Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan*. Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1973, 91-92.

[54] There are innumerable Political Department files on Siddiq Hasan Khan's "seditious works," though IOR, CR, R/1/1/33 spells out the case against him most thoroughly, providing citations from his writings and details of his fall from grace. Oddly, there is no mention of one of his other works, *Tarjuman-i-Wahhabiyyat*, which was intended to prove the loyalty of members of the Ahl-i-Hadith movement. See Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, 279.

past.[55] As already suggested, the Begam and other prominent women of Bhopal also wrote in a more contemporary style, adopting the issues of women's uplift and social reform, which had been raised by earlier male reformers, as well as the previous ruler of the state, Shah Jahan Begam. By considering their views, which they advanced in print, on the 'burning' issues of gender relations, education, purdah, child marriage and polygamy, as well as numerous other topics, it is possible to uncover how these pioneering women not only furthered the development of literature in the state, but also appropriated the language of reform and took another step forward in the movement for women's rights.

The Earliest Writing of Sultan Jahan Begam

Though the first works of Sultan Jahan Begam were not published until several years after her accession to the throne, it appears that she was attracted to both writing and reformist issues from an early age. In the early 1870s, when she was only 15 or 16 years old, she set herself the task of recording all the important incidents of her early life, as well as subsequent events. This project was motivated by her marriage, an event which she believed would change her life completely, as she would then be responsible for her own house. She stated at the outset that she wanted to write everything down about both her "previous life" and her new situation, as the information may be "useful" in the future. She sought to compile this account in a comprehensive and methodological style, numbering each "recollection" and leaving a column for the date. The actual document is somewhat more haphazard than she apparently intended, as it is written in a hurried fashion, missing most of the punctuation, dates and other particulars, and ends abruptly after just 16 pages.[56] Nevertheless, this unique manuscript does reveal some of her earliest reformist tendencies and later preoccupations.

Perhaps, most interesting is the historical consciousness that the mere commencement of this journal reflects. Though Sultan Jahan was comparably isolated from outside influence, she had obviously internalized the importance placed in reformist circles on producing a genuine Indian history, since her first significant writing effort stressed, not creativity, but chronology, accurate documentation of facts, and the usefulness of this endeavour. Similarly,

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[55] See Muhammad Amin Zuberi's many works on the history of Bhopal, including *Begamat-i-Bhopal*; and *Hayat-i-Sultani*. Agra: Azizi Press, 1939.

[56] This document, hereafter referred to as the *Diary of Sultan Jahan Begam*, was found amongst the possessions of Princess Abida Sultaan, granddaughter of Sultan Jahan, in her home in Karachi, Pakistan. It is written in Urdu, though it contains extensive Persian and Arabic vocabulary.

the largest portion of the manuscript (12 of the 16 pages) describes, in minute detail, her journey to Calcutta with her mother to meet the Duke of Edinburgh, a topic which reflects the growing preoccupation with travel as an educational process.[57] The decision to write such a personal document also reflects the process of interiorization occurring in the Muslim community as a result of the growth of print culture. As reading and writing had become private activities, accessible beyond the religious circles of the *'ulama*, new literary forms, including the autobiography, the novel and the short story, had emerged to express a growing sense of self. By keeping a journal, the young future ruler was similarly asserting, in Francis Robinson's terms, "the manifold nature of the human individual."[58]

Her commentary on events also reflects prevalent reformist ideas of the time, which were being circulated by Sayyid Ahmad Khan and others. In particular, she speaks in a disapproving manner of excessive expenditure on ceremonies such as her mother's investiture and her own *bismillah*. She also praises her grandmother for the thorough arrangements she made for her education, noting, again with disapproval, that her mother did not pursue these matters in such an "intense" way. Finally, she consistently shows pride in Islam and Muslim culture. Even when a European doctor cures her of a childhood illness, her faith in both the will of God and traditional Yunani medicine is not shaken; she claims that it was not due to his treatment, but because God had "put life" in her that she recovered.

As Malavika Karlekar has documented, autobiographical works, including Rassundari Debi's *Amar Jiban* [My Life] and Kailasbasini Debi's *Janaika Grihbadhur Diary* [A Certain Housewife's Diary], were being produced by Bengali Hindu women from the mid- to late nineteenth century.[59] Comparable works in the Muslim community were not, however, forthcoming. Only one Muslim woman, Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani, a wealthy zamindar and educationalist from East Bengal, is known to have composed a personal narrative in the form of a short autobiographical introduction to her book, *Rupjalal*, published in 1876.[60] As a result, it seems highly unlikely that it was common for Muslim girls of the same period to keep a diary in the way that the young Sultan Jahan did. It suggests a rare preoccupation, for a Muslim woman of that era, with writing and reform, which undoubtedly emerged from her

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[57] For further discussion of the culture of travel and Sultan Jahan's participation in it, see chapter V.
[58] Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change," 229-251.
[59] Malavika Karlekar. *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, 114-131.
[60] Amin, *Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal*, 215-217.

unique ancestry and upbringing, as well as the intellectual climate of the Muslim community at the time. Interestingly, this journal appears to have provided the basis for the opening sections of the first volume of her published autobiography. When it was released, about forty years later, it was still considered remarkable for an Indian Muslim woman to be taking part in literary pursuits, particularly in the newer more personal genres, although Middle Eastern women were already fairly established in the field.[61] The reviews in English papers noted that the book was of "deep interest," because it gave, not only a faithful account of the running of a "typical native State," but also an intimate look into the life of an Indian lady from her own perspective.[62] Of course, it is of particular importance in the context of this work, because it develops, along with her many other later publications, the reformist ideas, which are hinted at in her inaugural writing.

The balance of this chapter will evaluate the reformist writing of Sultan Jahan Begam and the other women of Bhopal when it flowered in the early twentieth century. Significantly, this flowering only occurred, as it did in lives of Begam Rokeya and the Bengali Hindu writers mentioned above, after the death of Sultan Jahan's husband and mother. Having been freed from the constraints of patriarchal- and matriarchal- control, she was able, not only to pursue literary projects, as she had done before her marriage, but also to encourage her female subjects and dependents to do the same.[63] An attempt will be made to give the main lines of their arguments, characterize their style, and comment upon the significance of their work. Attention will first be given to defining women's status in Islam, a process which involved shunning customary rituals and revalidating Islamic law. It was one of the first steps taken by reformers towards developing a revitalized identity for Indian Muslims in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The following sections will discuss the debates on purdah and female education, demonstrating how women worked within socially accepted traditions in order to gain acceptance for a moderate program of reform, which would bring gradual improvements to their position. Finally, the discussion will turn to matters of political and economic equality, uncovering how elite women reformers of this generation remain dedicated to a hierarchical notion of society which preserved their own privileged position.

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[61] Turkish women had began writing novels on women's rights from the early 1890s, although the most well-known author, Halidé Edib, did not begin writing seriously until the early years of the twentieth century. She also published her memoirs, a work very comparable to Sultan Jahan Begam's autobiography, in 1926. See *The Memoirs of Halidé Edib*. London: John Murray, 1926.

[62] "A Begam's Reminiscences," *The Times Literary Supplement* (London), 30 May, 1912, 222.

[63] For a comparable development in the life of Begam Rokeya, see Hossain, *Rokeya*, 64.

The Rights and Duties of Women in Islam

Sultan Jahan Begam maintained that it was a universal truth that everyone, whether male or female, rich or poor, deserved to be treated with justice. For Muslim women, this meant according them the extensive rights conferred upon them by their religion. As there was much confusion over what this actually meant, the Begam sought to elucidate in several speeches and pamphlets the status of women in Islam, as defined in the Qur'an and other sacred scriptures. Such an aim had also been taken up by other reformist thinkers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and she relied on some of these earlier more general works, including Nazir Ahmad's *Al-Huquq-wa'l-Fara'iz*,[64] in her own tracts. Like these male reformers, she sought to compile the fundamental aspects of Islamic law in an accessible manner, so as to reintroduce the Indian Muslim community, and especially women, to a form of their religion that was free from cultural accretions. This process of securing just treatment for women in connection with the regeneration of the wider community was an aspect of reform movements throughout the Muslim world that responded to the threat of Western imperialism.[65]

Sultan Jahan Begam's primary argument was that Islam had come to the "redemption" of woman when she was "in the lurch," providing her with more rights than any other religion that had come before. She gave proof for this in a speech to the Ladies' Club in Bhopal, published separately as a pamphlet in 1922, by comparing the status of women in Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and other pre-Islamic doctrines with that granted by the Prophet Muhammad. All of the pre-Islamic ideologies, she argued, considered women to be impure or sinful beings, unworthy of rights or respect. Islam, on the other hand, treated women with kindness and decency, giving them the powers to resist male tyranny and oppression. It did this, first of all, by banning abuses against women that were common in the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance such as female infanticide and unlimited polygamy. The Begam supported her position in this text, as in others, by quoting relevant passages from the Qur'an in Arabic, which she subsequently explained in Urdu, the language of her audience.[66] By

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[64] This book was published in three volumes by Muhammad Abdul Ghafoor in Delhi in 1906. It was a compilation of Islamic doctrine, mostly taken from the *shari'at*, which was written in an unscholarly way, so as to make it accessible to the wider Muslim community. For further discussion of this book in the context of other reformist works, see M. Mujeeb. *The Indian Muslims*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967, 410-413. Sultan Jahan Begam mentions her use of this book in the introduction to *Sabil ul-Jinan*, vi.

[65] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 12.

[66] Sultan Jahan Begam. *Islam main 'Aurat ka Martaba*. Bhopal: Hamidia Art Press, 1922, 1-10.

remaining within the context of Islam, Sultan Jahan was distinguished from her more radical Bengali contemporary, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, who sought to challenge the very foundations of Islam by questioning the divine inspiration of Qur'anic edicts on women.[67]

Sultan Jahan Begam's method of reasoning can be best seen by following her argument on the controversial topic of polygamy, as it was forwarded in various tracts and speeches. She began by relating how the practice was observed in the Age of Ignorance, explaining that, then, men used to marry innumerable orphan girls with the sole purpose of gaining their fortunes. As God disliked such luxury and indulgence, the Prophet Muhammad had sought to regulate, though not forbid, the practice by instituting polygamy as a "remedial" law, applicable only in special circumstances, and within certain limitations. On the basis of her own reading of the Qur'an, the Begam specified that a man was permitted to take up to four wives on the condition that he treated them all with perfect impartiality and justice. She defined legitimate circumstances to include both societal reasons such as wars and personal grounds such as the inability of a first wife to bear children or the incompatibility of a husband and wife. If a man indulged in polygamy without a justifiable reason, or did not fulfil the conditions imposed by Islam, she asserted that he deserved to be treated with public derision and scorn.[68]

Sultan Jahan Begam's position on polygamy was far more favourable than that taken by her contemporaries in the Middle East, including Malak Hifni Nasif in Egypt and Halidé Edib in Turkey, who had experienced the custom first-hand.[69] Nevertheless, she, too, recognized that polygamy could have harmful effects that a woman may want to avoid. If this was the case, she suggested that an extra clause could be added to the woman's marriage contract, which stated that, if her husband were to take another wife, she would receive special damages, or have the option of living apart, with a suitable maintenance, or even be granted a divorce.[70] The Begam noted that such measures were not usually necessary, since most men realized they were incapable of treating two wives equitably; they were deterred from even trying by the Prophet's comment that an unjust husband would appear before God

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[67] See Hossain, *Rokeya*, 80-82.

[68] Sultan Jahan Begam. *Muslim Home Part I: Present to the Married Couple*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1916, 18-20. This book was also printed in Urdu under the title *Hadiyat ul-Zaujain*. Madras: Weekly Newspaper Press, 1917. The section on polygamy to which this discussion refers was also reprinted as an article, "Polygamy" in *Islamic Review* (Woking), 4 (May, 1916), 211-215.

[69] Thomas Philipp. "Feminism and Nationalist Politics in Egypt" in Beck and Keddie, *Women in the Muslim World*, 283; and Edib, *Memoirs*, 142-146, 308.

[70] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Muslim Home*, 25.

on Judgement Day "with half his body dangling or paralysed."[71] However, if measures were thought to be necessary, the Begam stressed that they needed to be made before the marriage; once the second marriage had gone ahead, it was the first wife's duty to please and obey her husband, even if he did not treat her with the required fairness.

With this statement, Sultan Jahan Begam hinted at an essential aspect of her approach to the relative position of men and women in Islam: far from being involved in the 'gender war' of Western feminists, the sexes were conceived of as fulfilling complementary roles in society that were dictated by their distinct natures and constitutions. She articulated a renewed theory of biological difference, like Islamist writers across the Muslim world, including Fatima Rashid in Egypt, that placed her at odds with more radical female intellectuals, including Nabawiyah Musa and Begam Rokeya, who insisted that gender roles were socially constructed, rather than ordained by nature or religion.[72] Women had been put in charge of domestic responsibilities, since they had the physique to bear children and the tenderness to raise them, while men were required to protect all life and property with their innate physical strength. This was not to deny their essential equality. Quoting Surah 33, verse 35, of the Qur'an,[73] the Begam argued that Islam made no distinction between the sexes on moral or religious grounds, since it was promised that both men and women would be pardoned or rewarded, in exactly the same way, for honourable behaviour in their separate spheres; women would receive the equivalent spiritual merit for "lighter" acts of devotion, like bearing and raising children or going on pilgrimage to Mecca, that men would receive for attending congregational prayers or fighting in battles. Remaining in line with Muslim lawmakers, the Begam recognized that men had been granted slight preeminence in the worldly hierarchy , since they had the additional charge of taking care of women. However, she maintained that this male superiority did not lower women's overall position, but simply resulted in peace and good governance in the universe.[74]

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[71] 'Speech by Her Highness on Polygamy and Equality of Sexual Rights in a Grand Meeting of the Ladies' Club, 26 November, 1921' in *Decennial Report*, 176.

[72] Badran, *Feminists*, 66; and Hossain, *Rokeya*, 86.

[73] According to 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's translation, this passage reads: "For Muslim men and women- / For believing men and women, / For devout men and women, / For true men and women, / For men and women who are / Patient and constant, for men / And women who humble themselves, / For men and women who give / In charity, for men and women / Who fast (and deny themselves), / For men and women who / Guard their chastity, and / For men and women who / Engage much in Allah's praise- / For them has Allah prepared / Forgiveness and great reward." *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*. Brentwood: Amana Corporation, 1992, 1067. All future quotations from the Qur'an are from this volume unless otherwise stated.

[74] Sultan Jahan Begam made this point regarding the equal, but complementary nature of the sexes in several

Sultan Jahan Begam emphasized that women had been granted many special rights and privileges by the Prophet Muhammad in compensation for their physical weakness, including proper maintenance, *mahr* and a share of inheritance. These were rights that were often overlooked by Indian Muslim males, who sought to avoid the adverse effects such laws would have on their economic status.[75] Like Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali, she also stressed that husbands were obliged to treat their wives with kindness in non-financial matters. This was a point that she made in several of her tracts in an attempt to refute the assertions of non-Muslims that men were allowed to maltreat their wives in Islam. Women deserved, not only affection, but also the freedom to visit their families, participate in social and religious circles and pursue education. The Begam noted that this latter point was particularly important, since a man who did not encourage his wife's education would be held responsible for her poor knowledge of law and religion, both on earth and in the afterlife.[76]

In return for all these rights, Sultan Jahan maintained that a wife was simply obliged to return her husband's displays of kindness, showing him obedience, chastity and devotion. This emphasis on the mutual offering of comfort and support reflected the increasing importance being attached, often in response to Victorian ideals of marriage, to the Qur'anic adage that the sexes should "be to each other as ornaments."(2:187) The method by which a woman would actually fulfil her duties was a theme that was taken up at length by Muslim female intellectuals throughout India and the Middle East, who sought to professionalize the household tasks that women performed, imbuing them with a scientific aspect that would elevate their prestige. Sultan Jahan Begam herself published extensive texts on the topic of 'domestic science,' including *Khanadari*, a 456-page guide to household management, and *Faraiz un-Nisa*, a lengthy treatise on women's responsibilities.[77] The topic was also taken by other women in Bhopal, including the ruling Begam's daughter-in-law, Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam. In a lecture to the Ladies' Club, she proclaimed that, if a woman did not effectively manage the household, it would lead to nothing less than the collapse of society.

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speeches, including "Speech by Her Highness on Polygamy and Equality" in *Decennial Report*, 184; and *Islam main 'Aurat ka Martaba*, 10. It is developed most comprehensively, however, in her book, *Muslim Home*, 1-5, in a section that was also reprinted as an article, entitled "Relative Position of Man and Woman in Islam," in *Islamic Review* (Woking), 4 (Jul., 1916), 300-305.

[75] Rashid ul-Khairi. "Musalman Mard ki Khudhgarzi," *'Ismat* (Delhi), cited in Ali, *Emergence*, 376.

[76] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Muslim Home*, 27-31, 34, 66; and 'Speech by Her Highness on Polygamy and Equality' in *Decennial Report*, 179-180.

[77] Sultan Jahan Begam. *Khanadari*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1916; and *Faraiz un-Nisa*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1921. For comparable examples in the Egyptian context, see Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 140-141.

For how, Shah Bano asked, could a man smoothly conduct national affairs if he had an ill-tempered wife, who was extravagant with his income and ignored their children's education?[78]

Sultan Jahan Begam agreed that domestic stability was essential to the smooth running of the nation. For this reason, she, like traditional lawmakers, urged parents to avoid any basic incompatibility between a couple, particularly on the basis of mismatched wealth or standing, when organizing a marriage.[79] Once the ceremony had occurred, however, she discouraged any attempt to bring about the dissolution of marriage, claiming that divorce was "hateful" to God and condemned in the Islamic law books. Only in "impossible" situations was it permitted such as when a man neglected, deprived or unduly beat his wife, or she flagrantly "misbehaved." Like Amir 'Ali and Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali before her, the Begam recognized Muslim women's right to initiate divorce in these circumstances, a practice known as *khul'a*, while condemning the procedure of pronouncing the three formulas of divorce on one occasion. She also confirmed that a woman retained her right to *mahr*, her personal estate and remarriage if she was divorced by her husband, though she lost the right to dowry if she initiated the proceedings herself.[80] These legal rights became increasingly important to Muslim female intellectuals in India in the 1930s, as is evident from the large number of articles on the topic in women's journals such as *'Ismat*.[81] They were, at least partially, recognized with the passage of the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act in 1939.[82]

In trying to bring marriage practices in line with Qur'anic injunctions, the Begam of Bhopal did not just target those customs that were implemented by male lawmakers in a way that was detrimental to women. She also directed her reforming zeal at "unnecessary and superstitious" rituals that had been adopted from other communities by Muslim women themselves. Above all, she entreated women to organize marriage ceremonies in the simple,

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[78] "English translation of a speech delivered by Maimoona Sultan Begam in the Ladies' Club": 'The duties nature has assigned to the fair sex and how to perform them,' in *Decennial Report*, 32-34.

[79] "English translation of a speech delivered by Her Highness on the various customs and ceremonies connected with Marriages and Deaths" in *Decennial Report*, 77-78. Other qualities to be looked for in a husband were identified by Sultan Jahan Begam when discussing her own marriage in *Account*, vol. I, 57.

[80] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Muslim Home*, 46-62. The Begam of Bhopal was a firm opponent of divorce in practice, as well as in theory. Upon hearing of the Nawab of Rampur's divorce from Chhami Begam, sister of the Nawab of Jaora, in 1922, she wrote him a vitriolic letter, claiming that his "egregious folly" was a "grave and national wrong" that would bring "infamy and disgrace" upon his "illustrious home." Sultan Jahan Begam to the Nawab of Rampur, 19 Aug., 1922, NAI(B), BSR No. 10 (B. 76), 1922

[81] See Ali, *Emergence*, 390-391.

[82] This act defined the grounds on which Muslim women could seek divorce, giving a wider interpretation than that recognized by the Hanafi school. Due to financial and purdah constraints, however, most women were unable to take advantage of it. John L. Esposito. *Women in Muslim Family Law*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982, 78.

practical manner that was common in the early years of Islam, rather than wasting the community's limited resources on large dowries, excessive *mahr* and extravagant wedding parties. She gave the example of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, who had been provided with only a sieve, a leather cushion, a quilt and a handmill on the occasion of her marriage to 'Ali. If rich families feared that they would be censured for their frugality, she suggested that they donate any extra funds to charitable causes for the good of the Muslim community such as scholarship or marriage funds for poor girls and orphans.[83] In urging women to relinquish customary marriage celebrations, she resembled Thanawi and other male reformers, who, overcome by their desire for Islamic correctness, failed to recognize that these occasions offered rare opportunities for purdah-bound women to seek influence and amusement outside their homes.[84]

In many other circumstances, however, Sultan Jahan Begam deviated significantly from other Muslim reformers, particularly those belonging to the *'ulama*, taking a contradictory position on the reform of corrupted rituals. It was seen above that the Begam recognized that remarriage by a divorced or widowed woman was permitted by the Muslim religion. Yet she spoke of the practice with obvious disfavour in the first volume of her autobiography when referring to the marriage of her widowed mother and Siddiq Hasan Khan, claiming that it was "contrary to the customs of the Afghan race," and, therefore, to be treated as a "heinous sin."[85] Similarly, she expressed disapproval at her stepfather's efforts to discourage her mother from performing an elaborate *chatti* ceremony for her granddaughter, Bilqis, forty days after her birth, even though he explained such rituals were not sanctioned by Islam.[86] Evidently, her unconscious acceptance of certain conventions, as well as her personal dislike of her stepfather, inhibited her endorsement of a consistent reformist platform.

Her writings on the customary practice of child marriage reveal further inconsistencies in her thinking. In a carefully researched treatise on women's status in Islam, Sultan Jahan Begam gave only the ambiguous ruling that it was "sometimes necessary" to marry minors. At these marriage negotiations, their guardians would stand in as their representatives, although both the boy and the girl had the power to dissolve the contract when they came of

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[83] "Speech delivered by Her Highness on the various customs and ceremonies connected with Marriages and Deaths" in *Decennial Report*, 70-75.
[84] Gail Minault. "Other Voices, Other Rooms: The View from the Zenana" in Nita Kumar, ed. *Women as Subjects*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994, 114.
[85] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. I, 104.
[86] *Ibid.*, 102.

legal age, since Islam required the agreement of both parties to marriage.[87] Early marriage was, however, a practice she discouraged, particularly when it proved an obstruction to female education. As she stated explicitly in the second volume of her autobiography, "I do not consider early marriage very desirable either from the medical or social point of view."[88] Yet she also stressed that marriages should not be put of indefinitely, claiming that many evils could result from keeping a young girl unmarried too long, especially in a hot country like India.[89] Such a position was motivated neither by convention, nor Islamic injunctions. Instead, it seemed to emerge out of the Begam's intuitive feelings on the matter.

Apart from these exceptions, the Begam of Bhopal almost exclusively placed her writings on the rights and duties of women within the context of Islam, quoting the Qur'an and the *hadith* to support her reformist position. In doing this, she followed the example of her male predecessors, most notably, Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali in *Huquq un-Niswan*, as well as her female contemporaries in the Middle East. While modern feminists may view her as a religious apologist, her ideas, in fact, display a radicalism unique for her age. She sought to provide Indian Muslim women, who had traditionally been refused many of their rights, with proper treatment by their fathers and husbands, economic security and a degree of independence. By building on religious injunctions, Sultan Jahan Begam was able to buttress her demands with a higher authority that guaranteed her, at least, limited success. However, her reliance on Islamic tradition ultimately limited her program for the reform of her female co-religionists. Though she recognized that women were spiritually equal to men, she condemned them to a position of inferiority on earth by her acceptance of a worldly hierarchy.

Purdah

Of all the reformist topics discussed, the one that led to the widest divergence of opinion was purdah, or the seclusion of women. Most early reformers, including Nazir Ahmad and Hali, had not thought to even question its customary observance. By the early decades of the twentieth century, however, certain leading Indian Muslims, most notably the Shafi family of Lahore and the Tyabji family of Bombay, were promoting the abandonment

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[87] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Muslim Home*, 14.

[88] Sultan Jahan Begam. *An Account of My Life*. Vol. II. Tr. by Abdus Samad Khan. Bombay: The Times Press, 1922, 225.

[89] "Speech delivered by Her Highness on the various customs and ceremonies connected with Marriages and Deaths" in *Decennial Report*, 72.

of purdah and stimulating an animated discussion on the future of the veil. In the introduction to Sultan Jahan Begam's comprehensive book on the subject, *Al-Hijab or Why Purdah is Necessary*, she firmly drew the battle lines in this great debate, stating that there were, in fact, three camps of opinion: (i) those who were totally opposed to it; (ii) those who wished to lessen its restrictions by providing their own interpretation of the relevant religious injunctions; and (iii) those who wished to maintain the purdah system, believing that to modify it would be contradictory to Islamic law and threatening to the "national honour."[90] As the title suggests, she was firmly in this last camp.

Sultan Jahan Begam's main object in writing *Al-Hijab* was to show that Islamic injunctions firmly supported the retention of strict purdah. She supported this assertion in the second chapter, "Purdah and Islamic law," with quotations from the Qur'an, the *sunnah* and the *shari'at*, as well as the writings of various Muslim thinkers. According to the Begam, the Qur'an itself clearly delineated the limits of proper purdah observance by ordering women to avoid displaying their "finery" as was done in the Age of Ignorance (33:33), to converse with men through a curtain (33:53) and to wear an outer wrapper if they had to go out (33:59). Unlike Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali and other modernist writers, who sought to take into account historical conditions and the special status of the Prophet's wives,[91] the Begam offered a strict interpretation of these verses, asserting that all women should avoid leaving their homes, even to attend public baths or the mosque, though the latter was not forbidden to them. If a woman did need to go out for some essential task, she was required to cover her entire person, including her hands and face, with a veil.[92] The Begam bolstered this position by citing a *hadith*, which stated, "The woman among you who does not stir out of her house will get the rewards of a soldier of God."[93] Furthermore, she maintained that all of these purdah injunctions were followed by the women of early Islam without question, although they actively participated in religious and educational activities. Such was evident from the

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[90] Sultan Jahan Begam. *Al-Hijab or Why Purdah is Necessary*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1922, 1-2. This book was first published in Urdu under the title *'Iffat ul-Muslimat*. Agra: Mufid-i-'Amm Press, 1918. The Begam also referred to the necessity for purdah restrictions in her lectures; for example, "English translation of a speech delivered by Her Highness in response to the address submitted [to] her by the Members of the Ladies' Club, Bhopal, at a Garden Party, on the 13th of January, 1917" in *Decennial Report*, 105. This section will, however, rely on her discussion in *Al-Hijab*, as it is most comprehensive.

[91] Minault, "Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and 'Huquq un-Niswan,'" 160. For a modern version of this argument, see Fazlur Rahman. "The Status of Women in Islam: A Modernist Interpretation" in Papanek and Minault, *Separate Worlds*, 290-291.

[92] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Al-Hijab*, 48-54.

[93] *Ibid.*, 56.

example of Umm-i-Khalid, the wife of one of the Companions, who even on the tragic occasion of her son's martyrdom remembered to wear her veil, commenting, "My son has been martyred but not my modesty."[94]

Having established that women were intended to remain in their homes or behind a veil, the Begam of Bhopal turned her attention in the third chapter to the question, firstly, of how far women should observe purdah within their own houses, and, secondly, if women were ever permitted to participate in public affairs. On the first matter, her reading of the works of Muslim jurists led her to conclude that women may uncover their hands and faces in the house before related males, though not their brothers-in-law, as well as converse with strangers, observe "decent" entertainments and attend prayer meetings from behind a curtain.[95] The testimony and example of 'Aisha, the Prophet's favourite wife, confirmed for the Begam that Muslim women were also lawfully permitted to leave the house for all "religious, educational, political and social duties of the world." In particular, they were allowed to make long journeys, if accompanied by a male relative or a large group, take part in scholarly pursuits, including the imparting of knowledge to disciples, participate in wars as nurses on the battlefield, and join religious and national assemblies, if separate accommodation was made and there was "no danger of any mischief." She substantiated this final point by narrating a tradition of the Prophet, which stated that his female companions could attend meetings held for "humanitarian and virtuous objects," if they were "decently dressed and covered."[96]

In admitting women these rights, Sultan Jahan Begam fell back in line with modernists throughout the Muslim world, including Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali in India and Malak Hifni Nasif in Egypt, who sought to increase women's participation in the public sphere without seriously challenging the veil.[97] Her focus, however, remained firmly on the need for purdah, not only to protect women from insult and molestation, but also to allow them the freedom to complete their "natural duties" in the home. She quoted the pronouncements of prominent Indian Muslim jurists, ranging from Shah Waliullah to Nazir Ahmad, all of whom agreed that only "evil" could result from the free mixing of the sexes. To support her position, Sultan Jahan recounted various parables from the writings of the above authors, including one in which men

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[94] *Ibid.*, 60-61.
[95] *Ibid.*, 107-108.
[96] *Ibid.*, 110-118.
[97] See Minault, "Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and 'Huquq un-Niswan,'" 163; and Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 113.

and women were said to be like two oxen yoked to a bullock cart. Women, the weaker, slower animals, were assigned to the less arduous right side of the cart, symbolizing the easier tasks of housekeeping, while men took the more strenuous left side, which involved earning a living. This division of labour was suited to women's delicate physiques, which demanded that they live a comfortable, indoor life in seclusion.[98]

Sultan Jahan Begam's position on the veil was very much like that forwarded by members of the Islamist movement, notably Syed Abul A'la Maududi, when it emerged in the 1930s.[99] Like Maududi, she was also particularly concerned to highlight the negative effects of the non-observance of purdah in the West by quoting, not only legal and religious texts, but also newspaper accounts, medical reports, criminal investigations and conservative sociological treatises by Europeans themselves. Her actual arguments will be considered in chapter V, as part of the discussion on foreign influences on reform in Bhopal, but their main purport was to show that the free mixing of the sexes had led, throughout history, to an increase of crime against women, the debasement of family life and the general degradation of culture and civilization.[100]

Examples from the West, in conjunction with instances from Islamic history, were also used when Sultan Jahan Begam turned to refuting the opponents of purdah in the final section of the treatise. Missionaries, government officers, educated Muslims and nationalists had levelled a wide variety of accusations at the custom, the most damaging of which were that purdah was detrimental to women's health, education, prosperity and patriotism. The Begam addressed the economic issue first, claiming that articles in any Western newspaper would show that working women were only treated to "drudgery," "unhealthiness" and attacks to their honour, rather than abundant wealth. *Purdahnashin*, on the hand, received all "comforts and conveniences" from their husbands, who were virtually slaves to their well-being.[101] The contention that purdah was not conducive to good health was similarly false, according to the

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[98] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Al-Hijab*, 95-97. This metaphor of the "cart of life," used often by the Begam in her speeches and writings, was taken from Nazir Ahmad's *Mir'at ul-'Arus* in which he wrote, "the cart of life cannot move an inch unless it has one wheel of man and another wheel of woman." Quoted in Naim, "Prize-Winning *Adab*," 305.

[99] See Syed Abul A'la Maududi. *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*. Tr. and ed. by Al-Ash' Ari. Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 1992 (reprint). This text was first published as a series of articles in Maududi's Urdu journal, *Tarjuman ul-Quran*, in 1935.

[100] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Al-Hijab*, 121-181. For comparisons in Maududi, see chapters entitled "Tragic Consequences" in *Purdah*, 35-64.

[101] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Al-Hijab*, 186-187.

Begam, since there was no evidence that impure household air was causing Muslim women to weaken and die out. In her opinion, seclusion actually improved women's health by protecting them from contagious diseases and giving them the opportunity to do five to six hours of exercise each day in the form of "vigorous household work."[102]

Turning to education, Sultan Jahan Begam refuted the assertion that purdah was a hindrance to higher education for women by quoting recent examples of Muslim girls passing university examinations.[103] Furthermore, she maintained that a higher educational standard for women in co-educational institutions was not worth the grave societal problems, including increased rates of divorce and illegitimate births, that had accompanied the development in Europe. In making this point, she anticipated the more well-known writings of Maududi published nearly two decades later.[104] The Begam's final rebuttal was directed at nationalist reformers, who argued that women needed to be emancipated in order to display their patriotism. Just as they evoked instances from the 'golden age' of Indian history to support their position, she also used the past, though in a more local and recent form, quoting the incident of women's heroic defence of Bhopal city in 1812. She claimed that this occasion proved that women in purdah were actually more patriotic than their unveiled countrywomen, because they were able to guard Islamic morals, as well as the city.[105] Despite her refutations, it was not long before significant numbers of Muslim women themselves began to attack purdah on exactly these bases in women's journals such as *'Ismat*.[106]

Unlike her other tracts, Sultan Jahan Begam's treatise on the veil was not directed at conservative Muslims, ignorant women or even Europeans, so much as those modernist Muslims that Maududi later called the "Oriental Occidentals:" Western-educated Muslims who, in slavish imitation of European customs, advocated the lessening or abolition of purdah.[107] By depicting her opponents in this way, the Begam served only to eclipse the reality of the purdah debate for, in actuality, the arguments were not so explicit, nor the camps so clearly defined. Certain champions of the modification of purdah norms, notably, Sayyid

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[102] *Ibid.*, 190-192.

[103] Sultan Jahan Begam appears to have been referring specifically to the admirable performance by students of the Sultania Girls' School in Bhopal in the middle school examinations of the Allahabad University in the year the text was written.

[104] *Ibid.*, 193-198; and Maududi, *Purdah*, 54-63.

[105] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Al-Hijab*, 47, 200.

[106] See, for example, Jamila Begam. "Hamari Talim ka Maqsad" in *'Ismat*, 57, 1 (Sept., 1936), cited in Ali, *Emergence*, 359.

[107] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Al-Hijab*, 212; and Maududi, *Purdah*, 66.

Mumtaz 'Ali, were firmly rooted within the Islamic tradition, having received a comprehensive education in the Islamic sciences at Deoband or other prominent madrasas. They thoroughly questioned the accepted interpretations of relevant Qur'anic passages and *hadith* on seclusion, providing unassailable arguments in favour of the reform of existing customs. In comparison, the Begam's work seems childishly simplistic. Her arguments are frequently incomplete or illogical, leading to conclusions that rely on supposition. When placed beside a piece of rigorous scholarship such as *Huquq un-Niswan*, her study could be easily undermined. This is evident from looking at the respective interpretations of Qur'anic verses on women's modesty and mobility (24:30-31 and 33:59) by Sultan Jahan Begam and Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali; while the Begam simply asserted that the verses clearly ordered women to wear a full veil over their faces and bodies if they had to go out at all, Mumtaz 'Ali interpreted the language of the verses in the context of their revelation, explaining that the call for women to wear a shawl around their heads and bosoms was actually intended to increase their mobility in a time of uncertainty. In all other circumstances, men and women alike were enjoined to display their modesty by lowering their eyes and covering their private parts. He supported his position by citing respected Islamic jurists such as Abu Hanifa and Abu Yusuf, rather than the unidentified *hadith* and "popular divines" quoted by the Begam.[108]

Her fragile argument was weakened further by the many discrepancies in her writings. Within *Al-Hijab* itself, there are numerous incongruities; though she repeatedly states that, according to Islamic doctrine, women ought not to leave the house, except for emergencies, she later concedes that it is acceptable for them to take part in certain public affairs if they wear a veil. This latter position is given precedence in her autobiography when she emphatically writes, "the laws of Islam do not prohibit a Musalman lady from appearing at public assemblies in a *burqa*."[109] In the biography of her great-grandmother, apparently written before *Al-Hijab*, her position is so radically different, however, that she contradicts the primary message of the later book. She states that purdah has "certain advantages" due to the conditions in India, but that it is "not prescribed either by God or the Prophet." Furthermore, she maintains that "religious doctrine does enjoin such rigid adherence to the rules which have now become the custom."[110]

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[108] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Al-Hijab*, 48-62; and Minault, "Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and 'Huquq un-Niswan,'" 160.
[109] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. I, 92.
[110] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Qudsi*, 132.

Nawab Sultan Jahan, as stated above, was not a scholar, nor did she purport to be one. Though it is interesting to explore her writings for their intellectual merit, what is far more important about them to the historian is the significance of their overall message in the context of the time. In general, the Begam was an outspoken advocate of traditional purdah restrictions, maintaining that women should remain either behind the veil or in segregated female society. Her writings offer no room for give on this issue: purdah was necessary. Such a strict position brings Sultan Jahan in line with early reformers such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, as well as more conservative segments of Muslim society. Like them, she argued that the veil was an important symbol of Islamic tradition, representing the privileged and distinct status of Muslim women. She, thus, portrayed herself as an avowed protector of orthodox Muslim society.

Yet, in reality, Sultan Jahan challenged the bounds of female respectability by asserting that women could take part in public affairs from behind the veil. She maintained that Muslim women were free to travel and study, join conferences and meetings and even fight in battles, according to Islamic law. Like male reformers, she justified this position by quoting scriptural sources and giving examples from early Islamic history. It was her insistence on purdah norms that enabled her to call for this widening of the female sphere, justifying the involvement of herself and her followers in public activities. Similarly, her demand for a separate female domain created a need for female teachers, doctors and other workers, thus opening up certain professions to women. Her style of argument on purdah stresses the importance for women of this era to build on conventional norms, rather than calling for radical change directly. By picking up the language of reform, women were able to negotiate a space for the female voice within the existing discourse and further the process of women's emancipation.

Education

In the introduction to *Al-Hijab*, Sultan Jahan noted that the two most "interesting and important" problems facing Muslim women were purdah and education. She had decided to write the book, discussed above, because she rarely got opportunities to discuss seclusion, whereas she was provided with many occasions on which to express her opinions publicly on education. In fact, she took every possible chance to spread her views on the subject, writing short tracts and giving speeches at a variety of forums, both within her own state and throughout India. Even when she met Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, in 1917,

to discuss the upcoming legislative reforms, he remarked that the Begam of Bhopal was "frightfully keen on education, and jabbered about nothing else."[111] As a result, the Begam's ideas on education cannot be gleaned from one treatise, like those on purdah, but must be collected from writings, speeches and interviews made throughout her life. An effort will be made here to give general principles, without reference to the specific forums, as the relation between her ideas and their context will be discussed in later chapters.

Following in the footsteps of the 'second wave' of male reformers, including Hali, Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali and Shaikh 'Abdullah, Sultan Jahan Begam was an outspoken advocate of modern female education. Women, as the first teachers of children and the perpetuators of Islamic tenets and customs, required a thorough education in order to become the firm basis of a reformed Muslim family, which could revitalize the wider community. She voiced these opinions as early as 1903 in an interview in the renowned reformist journal, *The Indian Social Reformer*, remarking that it was "high time" an effort was made to provide education to the women of India, and especially Muslim women, since they were generally "unlettered and superstitious." The few women that were literate were addicted to reading trashy novels, a proclivity that Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi also rallied against in *Bihishti Zewar*.[112] She developed this argument in her autobiography, remarking that she had no sympathy whatsoever with the widespread position that girls should only be taught the Qur'an, the rudiments of Urdu and, perhaps, to write by male members of their family. What Muslim girls needed was a liberal school education that included both religious and secular instruction.[113] Having made this point, the Begam then took a step further than her male contemporaries, claiming that women's pivotal role in the religious training of children actually gave precedence to female education. As she wrote in pamphlet in 1911, "That men have done a great deal for our sex in the matter of education is evident but they have done much more for themselves, forgetting probably that *our education was more important than theirs*."[114]

Sultan Jahan Begam's stance on female schooling brought her in conflict, not only with conservative Muslims, who were against any form of modern education, but also early

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[111] Edwin S. Montagu. *An Indian Diary*. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1930, 22.
[112] Zafar Ali, interview by. "Mahomedan Female Education: The Begum of Bhopal: Her Opinion on the Subject," *The Indian Social Reformer* (Bombay), 13, 50 (16 Aug., 1903), 517-518; and Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 326.
[113] Sultan Jahan Begam. *An Account of My Life*. Tr. by C.H. Payne. London: John Murray, 1912, 323.
[114] Sultan Jahan Begam. *A Proposal by Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal for the foundation of a Girls' School at Delhi in commemoration of Her Majesty Queen Mary's visit to India in December, 1911*. Bhopal: Qudsia Press, 1912, 6. Italics added.

reformers, like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who advocated a modern education for men, while denying it, at least for the present, to women. Both groups contended that educated women would forget traditional values and begin questioning their place in society, thus undermining the whole Islamic social system.[115] The Begam dismissed this argument, claiming that the community had little choice in the matter now that modern education for men had begun in earnest, since the growing imbalance between men and women was hindering the advancement of Muslim civilization in general. Her favourite defence of this position was to use Nazir Ahmad's analogy, mentioned above, of identifying men and women with the wheels of a cart: if the two wheels did not move forward at the same pace, then the overall progress of the cart would be curbed.[116] Elsewhere, she attributed the need for equal educational opportunities for men and women to Islam, stating that the Qur'an had made it obligatory for both sexes to strive "to their fullest potential" to obtain social and cultural knowledge. This accounted for the large number of highly competent female scholars in Muslim history, notably 'Aisha.[117] By relying on primary Islamic sources and early Muslim history, she and other female reformers, including Begam Rokeya in Bengal, were able to infuse their educational platform with a validity that could not have been achieved had they relied on secular concepts, like 'natural rights,' that were being forwarded by male reformers in Egypt and Turkey.[118]

Fear of the 'new' educated woman by orthodox Muslims was also somewhat assuaged by Sultan Jahan Begam's consistent support of a curriculum that placed the greatest emphasis on religious and moral education. Though she sought to improve the earthly condition of Indian Muslims, her higher aim was to cultivate the religious spirit of her people so that they would receive the ultimate salvation of a heavenly reward. To fulfil this aim, women were required, even more than men, to understand the true meaning of Islam and act upon it, for it was they who passed Islamic teachings and morals on to their children.[119] Furthermore, she

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[115] Jalal, "Convenience of Subservience," 80-81. According to the Begam of Bhopal, it was the former group that she came up against most often in her own state: men of the "old school" that looked with suspicion on any education that went beyond "teaching lads to learn by rote the oldest and mouldiest book which their old and mouldy teachers could supply." *Account*, vol. I, 284.

[116] See, for example, Sultan Jahan's response to the speech of the Committee of the Aligarh Women's Madrasa, in 'Abdullah, *Riport*, 21.

[117] Address by Sultan Jahan Begam to the Khawatin-i-Dakkan, Hyderabad, 3 Sept., 1918, in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 180. For comparisons in Begam Rokeya's writings, see Hossain, *Rokeya*, 170-173.

[118] See, for example, Qasim Amin's *al-Mar'a al-jadida* [The New Woman], discussed in Philipp, "Feminism and Nationalist Politics in Egypt," 279.

[119] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Sabil ul-Jinan*, i-iii.

asserted that, if a child proceeded onto secular education without the benefit of religious training, the effect would be just like a gardener watering his rose bushes without pruning them. They would grow abundantly, but in all the wrong directions.[120] At this time, similar arguments were being forwarded by male and female educationalists throughout the Muslim world, including Begam Rokeya in Bengal and Shaikh 'Abdullah in UP, a fact that reflects the strategic importance of offering traditional subjects, as much as genuine religious feeling.[121]

The inordinate importance attached by the Begam to moral lessons was exhibited most clearly in her own curriculum for Anglo-vernacular girls' schools, drafted in the late 1910s. Unlike the works of other reformers that simply identified "religious instruction" or "the Qur'an" as a necessary subject,[122] it described, in minute detail, what moral virtues a girl should imbibe each year, ranging from honesty and courage to prudence and patriotism. The gravity of each subject grew as the girls became older, until, in their final year, they were required to learn the highest principles of Sultan Jahan's moral beliefs, that is the importance of simple living, mental and moral diligence, and "national duty." Surprisingly, this final topic did not refer to traditional responsibilities to the Muslim *qaum*, but very modern principles of serving one's country through such activities as exercising the vote, honouring national emblems and participating in local government.[123] Its inclusion highlights the interaction occuring within the colonial milieu between Islamic and Western ideas.

Beyond religious training, Sultan Jahan Begam consistently advocated that female education should be pursued with the view to producing a "practical result." Following a pattern that had been established in Turkey in the mid-nineteenth century, she dictated that girls should be taught, not only academic subjects, but also household management and other "feminine occupations," in order to prepare them for their future lives as a wives and mothers.[124] She voiced the opinion of most Muslim reformers, male and female, when she argued that the syllabus that was prevalent in girls' schools of the country, most of which were run by the colonial government or missionary organizations, was not suitable, since it merely reproduced the program that had been framed for Muslim boys. A course of study

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[120] "English translation of a speech delivered by Her Highness the Nawab Begam of Bhopal at the anniversary of the Ladies' Club, held in the year 1913" in *Decennial Report*, 136.

[121] See, for example, Hossain, *Rokeya*, 170-171; and Minault, "Shaikh Abdullah,", 221-222.

[122] See, for example, Rashid ul-Khairi's curriculum for the Muslim girls` school that he founded, as published in a special issue of *'Ismat* in 1921 entitled *Talim-i-Niswan*, described in Ali, *Emergence*, 63-64 n.68.

[123] Sultan Jahan Begam, drawn up under the instruction of. *Curriculum for Anglo-Vernacular Girls' Middle and Girls' Leaving Certificates*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, n.d., 1-10.

[124] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, 1912, 323; and Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 28.

needed to be framed specifically for Muslim girls by scholars of the Muslim community that would be suited to the needs of both the nation and the country. The Begam of Bhopal differed from most of her contemporaries, however, in asserting that the syllabus for Muslim girls could only be formulated by educated women themselves, since "the female temperament and character can be understood by women, and by women alone."[125] With this remark, the Begam introduced an element of autonomy to the women's reform movement, that was hitherto non-existent. It was soon after echoed in the speeches of her followers in Bhopal, notably those of Shah Bano Begam, but it was not until the early 1930s that it was more widely articulated by female reformers outside the state.[126]

Though Sultan Jahan Begam often decried the unsuitability of the existing curriculum, she rarely offered detailed alternatives in her early writings and speeches, instead deferring on such particulars to educational experts.[127] When the task had still not been taken up to her satisfaction in the the late 1910s, however, she initiated the process herself, publishing a curriculum to the primary, middle and school leaving standard, as was mentioned above. It was a comprehensive document that defined, not only the subjects to be studied, but also the degree to which they should be pursued at each level. Though more detailed and systematic, it compared favourably with ideas put forward by earlier Muslim intellectuals, including Nazir Ahmad, Hali and Thanawi, as it covered the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic at the lower levels, while introducing more academic subjects, including English, Geography, History and a classical language, in the higher grades. Throughout the program, the girls were also to be introduced to supplementary subjects such as drawing, sewing and calisthenics, which had a more "practical" aspect.[128]

The final section of this document, describing the two year course for the Girls' School Leaving certificate, highlights the Begam's educational ideal of improving women's status by making them better wives and mothers, capable of increasing their power in the home, rather than seeking influence in the public sphere. Though traditional academic subjects were included, they were generally limited to the skills required by the modern wife;

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[125] *Ibid.*, 324. Similar arguments are also found in Sultan Jahan Begam's speech to staff members of the Sultania Girls' School in Bhopal on the occasion of the opening of the Boarding House and Training Class, printed in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 153.

[126] "English translation of a speech delivered by Maimoona Sultan Begam in the Ladies' Club" in *Decennial Report*, 37; and Hossain, *Rokeya*, 145. An obvious exception was Begam Rokeya in Bengal.

[127] See, for example, Sultan Jahan Begam. *Draft Scheme for a Girls' High School at Delhi*. Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1912, 1-2

[128] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Curriculum*, 1-10. For comparison, see Minault, "Purdah's Progress," 79-80, 87, 91.

for example, courses in arithmetic and vernacular language consisted chiefly of book-keeping and letter-writing. Traditional areas of women's expertise, including sewing and cooking, were also expanded into courses that included the etiquette of table manners, the preparation of English food and the sewing of frocks, skills that were considered essential in modern colonial society.[129] As in Egypt, the prestige of home economics was also increased by endowing it with scientific qualities, borrowed from the West. This accounted for the introduction of such courses as human physiology, home nursing and "The Cook and the Kitchen," which intended to wean women away from conventional practices, deemed unhealthy and unsanitary, by providing them with functional medical knowledge. It also led to the inclusion of courses on the basics of child psychology, education and health, with a focus on Montessori's system for training children at home.[130] The choice of this system, not only by the Begam of Bhopal, but also by the Rani of Sangli and other educationalists, reflects the importance attached by Indian reformers to introducing modern methods, while remaining within an indigenous framework.[131]

The Begam's stance on education clearly illustrates how she was able to effect change by working within traditional mores. By providing a syllabus that stressed moral and religious teaching and domestic roles for women, she was able to overcome fears about sending girls to school and expand their sphere of activity, thus preparing them for a greater role in the social and, ultimately, political institutions of their community. Her focus on a female sphere also resulted in giving women an area of expertise where men could not interfere. Since only women knew about women, it was they who had to take responsibility for the reform of their own activities and institutions. In an unprecedented step, Sultan Jahan rejected the patronizing attitude of male reformers such as Rashid ul-Khairi, firmly placing Muslim women in charge of their own destiny.

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[129] Sultan Jahan Begam also sought to reform Muslim women's kitchens through her publication, *Matbakh-i-King George*, a collection of European cookery dedicated to the reigning King of England, but printed in Urdu. Agra: Shamsi Steam Press, n.d.

[130] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Curriculum*, 10-12.

[131] The system of learning developed by the Italian educationalist, Maria Montessori (1870-1952), though viewed as somewhat unorthodox in Britain, was felt to be in keeping with Indian values, due to its focus on the home and family. However, its spurning of artificial restraints, rigid discipline and conventional rules in favour of spontaneity leads it to sit somewhat uneasily with the traditional Islamic system of education. See Mario M. Montessori. *Education for Human Development: Understanding Montessori*. Oxford: Clio, 1992 (rev. ed.).

Political Rights of Women

Though many of the opinions of the women of Bhopal reflect the discourse of the time, others are peculiar to the state. The most conspicuous is, not surprisingly, Sultan Jahan Begam's consistent endorsement of women's rule. While writing of the deeds of early Muslim women, some of the more radical male reformers mentioned women who had held great political power or even the reins of government. Amir 'Ali, in particular, quoted examples of women such as Shajarat ul-Durr of Egypt, Absh Khatun of Persia, Raziyya Sultana of Delhi and Nur Jahan of Agra, who had held political influence in Islam.[132] But few went to the lengths of the Begam of Bhopal. She not only cited examples of effective female leaders in the past, but also argued that women were preferable as rulers, since their innate qualities made them better administrators. She defended this position by reconstructing the past achievements of women, not only in the Muslim world, but also in Europe and her own state.

Unlike other reformers, both Hindu and Muslim, who harked back to an ancient 'golden age,' twelve or more decades earlier, Sultan Jahan Begam most often evoked fairly recent events in the history of her own state, claiming that it was a sign of "God's special favour" to Bhopal that He had placed the reins of government in female hands throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She cited, in particular, the reign of her grandmother, Sikandar Begam, as evidence of women's superior rule, explaining that she had twice been able to save the state from near collapse by adhering to a 'feminine' policy of "peace and justice," rather than the sword, like her male predecessors. In addition, she had proved herself to be competent in those spheres traditionally thought to require male attributes, successfully remodelling the state army, improving agricultural production and stabilizing the economy.[133] The Begam supported her position in favour of female rule by quoting, as a second example, Queen Victoria, another modern female paragon, though from outside the Islamic or local tradition. Sultan Jahan Begam often referred to her as her "real mother," suggesting the influence of her values on reform in Bhopal.[134] It was only to add extra justification to her argument that the Begam mentioned several "splendid" queens from

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[132] Ameer Ali. "The Influence of Women in Islam," reprinted from *The Nineteenth Century*, May, 1899 in K.K. Aziz. *Ameer Ali: His Life and Work*. Lahore: Publishers United Ltd., 1968, 172-176.

[133] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. I, 4-5, 10-14. In defending the advantages of female rule, Sultan Jahan Begam also named her great-grandmother, Qudsia Begam, and her mother, Shah Jahan Begam, but never as often as Sikandar Begam. See, for example, Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Qudsi*, 102.

[134] Abida Sultaan, "The Begums of Bhopal," 35. Queen Victoria was also evoked as a role model by Nazir Ahmad and Hali, both of whom praised her for her sagacity and forbearance. See Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 51.

early Islamic history, including those discussed by Amir 'Ali, re-endorsing their mythical portrayal as women who had courageously commanded their armies and tactfully negotiated with their enemies.[135]

Sultan Jahan's study of world history and her own unique ancestry led her to the radical conclusion that "nature has specially intended [women] for rulers." This conclusion was based on her observation that administrative capacity was "more inherent" in women, who had the relevant qualities of "mercy, sympathy, toleration, fidelity and firmness," than it was in men, who had only the bodily strength to earn a living and fight in battles.[136] Such a contention contradicted her customary insistence on a separate sphere of activity for women, which focussed on domestic duty. This argument did, however, emerge in her speeches, when she invariably rallied against those women, including her close friend, Sarojini Naidu, who were seeking equal rights for men and women in modern social and political institutions. In that context, she asserted that it would be a "great mistake" for women, who had been ordained by nature to complete domestic duties, to demand political equality, since it would only "[destroy] the happiness and [disturb] the peace in our homes." She again employed the past to defend her position, claiming that each and every woman could not be like Chand Sultana, Raziyya Sultana or Sikandar Begam, as these were "exceptional" cases that were put on earth to show the "omnipotence" of God.[137] Presumedly, Sultan Jahan placed herself, alongside her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, in this same realm.

A fundamental contradiction, thus, existed between the Begam of Bhopal's own position as a female sovereign, and her justification for it, and her interpretations of the laws of Islam regarding women and their roles in society. She ultimately resolved it by designating her own elevated status to be a result of divine intervention. It was essential that the Begam establish that the existence of female political figures was an atypical occurence for several reasons that were fundamental to her world view. To grant women political equality would have upset the hierarchical scheme of relations in society, a scheme that she only believed was sanctified by God, but that also worked in her favour. If women's calls for sexual equality were heeded, it surely could not have been long before other hierarchies collapsed, including those that provided the basis for her exalted position as a member of the feudal elite. Indeed,

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[135] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Qudsi*, 98-101.
[136] *Ibid.*, 102.
[137] "Speech delivered by Her Highness at a Garden Party" in *Decennial Report*, 107.

ideas of equality were far too radical for Sultan Jahan Begam's conception of reform. She sought to build gradually on Muslim traditions, rather than attacking patriarchy directly, thus limiting women's demands to those clearly ordained by Islam, for example, education and legal rights within the family. This was a practical step for early Muslim female intellectuals, but the younger generation was not so patient in waiting for change.[138]

Philanthropy

Although the Begam of Bhopal was primarily concerned with the reform of women of her own class, she did raise the issue of the uplift of less elite women of society in certain passages of her speeches and writings. In her autobiography, for example, she spoke eloquently of the plight of "pitiable" women of her realm, including widows and illiterate village women, commenting that it was one of her "most important duties" to bring them "pleasure" and "sympathy."[139] To a large degree, this philanthropic interest was a reaction to basic religious tenets, which stated that all Muslims, male and female, must show sympathy to the less fortunate through the provision of *zakat*, or charity. However, it was also stimulated by the example of upper-class British women, who were actively involved in social welfare work, both in India and Britain. Like elite women throughout the Muslim world, and especially those of royal status, Sultan Jahan was encouraged by this influence to urge women of her own class to go beyond simply giving alms to the poor or establishing a *waqf* to support a public edifice. Such "plain" charity was disparaged on the basis that it created "excessive complacence," leading to "idleness" and an "undesirable burden on public funds."[140]

According to the Begam, what true charity required was for elite women to show "practical sympathy" to their fellow citizens by becoming personally involved with educational schemes for poor women. The most direct method by which they could do this was instructing ignorant women in the laws of hygiene. To this end, she published *Hifz-i-Sehat* [The Protection of Health], a manual on health and sanitation, which intended to improve sanitary conditions within the home and reduce the causes of sickness.[141] Members of the

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[138] See, for example, Begam Shahnawaz's appeal for women's political rights at the Round Table Conference in 1930, discussed in Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter*, 108-115.

[139] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, 1912, 278.

[140] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 222. As in India, the earliest philanthropic organizations in which women took a more direct role in Egypt were founded by members of the royal family; the most well known of these was Mabarrat Muhammad 'Ali, founded by Princess 'Ayn al-Hayat in 1909 to instruct new mothers in infant care. Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 172.

[141] Sultan Jahan Begam. *Hifz-i-Sehat wa Khanadari*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1916. The book also includes

Ladies' Club in Bhopal were also urged to spread this "wholesome knowledge of right living" by visiting the zenanas of poor homes to give lectures, even though the Begam recognized that it would be an unpleasant experience for women of their stature.[142] In order to improve the position of their disadvantaged sisters, Sultan Jahan Begam also suggested that elite women across India could found schools, as she herself did, in which impoverished women could be taught the skills of self-reliance through initiation into a trade or profession. She argued that such opportunities would not only protect disadvantaged women from being forced into prostitution or other disreputable occupations, but would also enhance their "usefulness," lessening the gap between rich and poor by making them reliant on one another.[143] Such paternalistic remarks highlight that the Begam, like elite activists elsewhere, did not actually seek to address the root causes of disease and poverty, but rather sought to bring a limited degree of uplift to lower class women in order to ease the position on members of her own class.

Social work, like that advocated by the Begam, promised a means of expanding women's public activity in a manner that was socially-accepted in conservative Indian Muslim society. For this reason, it became an increasingly popular theme in the writings and speeches of other women in Bhopal, particularly those of the younger generation. As on other subjects, these secondary writings generally echoed the sentiments of the ruling Begam. Numerous speeches were given at the Ladies' Club, particularly at special events, exhorting women, rich and poor, though especially poor, to keep their homes, bodies and clothing clean in order to avoid the spread of disease.[144] Similarly, speeches and articles were written on the need to provide charity that would bring "real and lasting" effects, while preserving the "personal dignity" of poor women. In a series of lectures on charity, Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam emphasized this message, proposing that a "good-natured lady" would be better off finding a poor widow employment in a "gentleman's house" or teaching her a skill of domestic

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suggestions on how to maintain physical fitness through exercise and a balanced diet.

[142] "English translation of a short speech delivered by Her Highness in the Ladies' Club, Bhopal" in *Decennial Report*, 89-90.

[143] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 222. Similar sentiments are also found in her speeches to the Khawatin-i-Islam in Lahore and the Khawatin-i-Dakkan in Hyderabad, printed in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 98, 181.

[144] Shah Bano Begam gave two comprehensive lectures on hygiene at the Ladies' Club in Bhopal, which are published in *Decennial Report*, 56-60, 61-66. Other lectures, given at a celebration of the club's anniversary in 1921, were collected and edited by Abru Begam in a separate publication. These will be discussed in greater detail in chapter II. The most relevant to this discussion was a talk by Mehrunnisa, a government-employed Health Visitor, on the principles to be followed for the protection of health in poor homes. See *Rahbar-i-Sehat*. Bhopal: Hamidia Art Press, 1922, 60-69.

industry, for example, lace-making or gold embroidery, than supplying her and her child with their daily food.[145]

Writings by the younger generation of women in Bhopal highlight, not only the influence of foreign ideas on philanthropy, but also the endurance of an Islamic framework. Writing in the local women's journal, *Zil us-Sultan*, Kishwar Jahan Begam, a relative of the Nawab Begam, defended her assertion that the "well-to-do" should maintain relations of "sympathy, cordiality, and good fellowship" with poorer members of society, and especially those of their own family, by quoting a tradition of the Prophet preserved by his widow, Safiya, in which he claimed that the greatest prayer in the sight of God was to offer charity and mercy, particularly to poor relatives.[146] Similarly, Shah Bano Begam gave a religious basis to her insistence on practical charity by relaying a story in which the Prophet had auctioned the belongings of a beggar so that he could buy an axe with which to earn a living.[147] As in Egypt, this reliance on Islamic notions of charity enabled elite women to gain acceptance for professional work outside the home in a way that never would have been possible had they demanded training in nursing or teaching for secular purposes.[148]

Islamic charity, however, also constrained the process of women's uplift by presupposing a hierarchical framework in which three immutable classes- the nobility, the middle classes and the poor- were bound to perform the duties assigned to them. As Shah Bano Begam stated explicitly, "the poor" were required to work hard and make an honest living, while "the nobility and middle class persons" were compelled to show solicitude for them and provide the means of their livelihood. She identified this division of labour as an "ordinary classification which has been long maintained and will surely hold forever."[149] Her statement reveals that, though elite Bhopali women sought to assist the lower classes, they did not aim to bring real uplift through the development of social and economic relations based on equality. Their acceptance of an Islamic hierarchy prevented even the recognition of any connection between the low status of women and a system of economic dependence.

This is not to deny that Sultan Jahan Begam and her companions felt genuine

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[145] "Speech delivered by Maimoona Sultan Begam in the Ladies' Club" in *Decennial Report*, 39-42.
[146] Kishwar Jahan Begam. "Kindness and Sympathy to Relations," reprinted from *Zil us-Sultan* (Bhopal) in *Islamic Review* (Woking), 6 (Oct.-Nov., 1918), 31-32.
[147] "English translation of a speech delivered by Maimoona Sultan Begam in the Ladies' Club, Bhopal" in *Decennial Report*, 54-55.
[148] For this process in the Egyptian context, see Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot. "The Revolutionary Gentlewoman in Egypt" in Beck and Keddie, *Women in the Muslim World*, 261-276.
[149] "Speech delivered by Maimoona Sultan Begam in the Ladies' Club" in *Decennial Report*, 42.

sympathy for the poor; that is evident from the above writings. Nor is it to deny that they appreciated that it was the exertions of the lower classes that enabled them to live as they did; the Begam stated at the outset of her autobiography that she knew it was due to the "labour and industry" of the poor cultivators of her state that she was able to rule and live in "state and luxury."[150] But there was simply no question of undermining the traditional hierarchy of Muslim social structure, which gave the Begam and the women of her social circle much of their status and influence as highly elite *ashraf* women. Sultan Jahan repeatedly asserted her belief that the superiority of one being over another, whether man over woman, or rich over poor, was inherent to nature. Though all were "knitted" together in a system of interdependence, these distinctions could never be levelled off.[151] Her acceptance of this hierarchical notion of society, intrinsic to the Islamic social system, was a barrier to elite Bhopali women realizing that they shared with lower-class women the experience of living under a patriarchal system of control, which was oppressive to them both. Anxious to protect their privileged economic and social position, they, thus, placated disadvantaged women with charity, limiting greater challenges to society, which would have brought more far-reaching changes.

Conclusions

In a reaction to the loss of status by *ashraf* Muslims under British rule, Islamic reformers such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Nazir Ahmad and Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali sought to reestablish the identity of their community by indicating areas for reform from the mid-nineteenth century. In order to spread their views, they wrote extensively in various forms, including religious tracts, magazines and novels. They often focussed on the women of their community as the main objects for reform, since they were considered responsible for training children and passing on religious knowledge and customs. However, it was not until the early twentieth century that a few women, mostly the wives of prominent male reformers, began writing themselves, offering their own views on reformist topics affecting women. These women, including Muhammadi Begam and Begam 'Abdullah, generally did not strongly challenge social mores, but rather worked within them, advocating girls' education, but not an abandonment of purdah or domestic roles.

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[150] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. 1, 14.

[151] 'Speech by Her Highness on Polygamy and Equality of Sexual Rights' in *Decennial Report*, 183.

Sultan Jahan Begam and the other elite women of Bhopal were a part of this tradition, writing and lecturing on topical reformist subjects such as gender relations within Islam, purdah and female education. Their theoretical works, however, brought not only continuity, but also innovation to the existing discourse. They emphasized the importance of women maintaining certain traditions such as wearing the veil, fulfilling domestic roles and passing on religious knowledge, in order to gain acceptance for their more radical demands, which included sending girls to school, founding women's clubs and conferences, and guaranteeing legal rights for women. Some of their more conservative views actually resulted in unprecedented developments in the movement for women's rights. For example, Sultan Jahan's insistence on a separate female sphere led her to conclude that there should be a high degree of autonomy in the women's movement. Similarly, her stress on woman's role as the first teacher of her children resulted in unparalleled importance being placed on female education and woman's role in the regeneration of Muslim society.

Yet the emancipation of Muslim women of this era was strictly bounded by Islamic traditions. Elite women writers were firm in their support of Islam's hierarchical notion of society, as it gave them a privileged position as a part of the *ashraf* class. For this reason, women, like the Begam of Bhopal, would promote improved status for women within the family, economic uplift for lower-class members of society and even autocratic female rule, but never absolute social and political equality for men and women, or rich and poor. It was not until the next generation that Muslim women, including the Begam's daughter-in-law, Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam, began to take further steps in their own writing. Like women of Sultan Jahan Begam's era, they built on the education and example provided to them by their predecessors. But they began to make demands for political rights and the abandonment of the veil, which would have been unthinkable twenty years before. In this way, Muslim women of the early twentieth century were able, first, to negotiate a space within the reformist discourse, then to develop an increasingly strident voice, calling for female rights never even considered by early reformers like Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

This chapter has focussed exclusively on the reformist message that was spread to the wider Muslim community through books and collections of speeches. Wide discrepancies often existed, however, between what was recommended in these theoretical writings and what was promoted in more partisan forums and by women's own actions. Sultan Jahan Begam herself actually felt that more emphasis should be placed on the latter message; she

consistently advocated 'taking action' and setting an example above giving speeches and writing tracts. In an address in 1913 to the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam, a Muslim women's organization in Punjab, for example, she argued that educational progress would be achieved at a far greater pace if Muslim reformers acted "in a practical sense" and set up schools, rather than simply talked about it.[152] As a result, the remainder of the thesis will turn away from theoretical writings to what the Begam herself felt was most important: practical work. It will investigate how the message and activities of the women of Bhopal varied at different times and in different forums and from what was advocated in theory.

[152] Address by Sultan Jahan Begam to the Khawatin-i-Islam in Lahore, in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 96.

II: Social Reform in Bhopal State

Introduction

Muslim reformers had began to agitate through the print medium for female education and other reforms from the mid-nineteenth century, but it was not until the 1920s and 1930s that practical endeavours for the amelioration of Muslim women in India finally began to take root. Even then, the statistics remained disheartening: the rate of female literacy recorded in the 1931 census was just 1.9% for Indian women in general and 1.2% for Muslim women in particular.[1] Yet statistics are illusive, hiding the accomplishments achieved by a few outstanding Muslim leaders in small pockets throughout India as early as the first years of the twentieth century. Bhopal, along with Aligarh, Lahore, Hyderabad, Calcutta and others, was one of these pockets, boasting a vibrant leader in the personage of Sultan Jahan Begam, as well as a dynamic group of workers. The Nawab Begam, as the ruler of the state, had an additional advantage over her fellow reformers in that she was able to use her dominions as a 'testing ground' for many of the reformist ideas that she advanced in published tracts and public lectures. In Bhopal, she established and promoted innumerable schools and training institutions, founded women's clubs and hospitals, and developed schemes for the uplift of under-privileged women. In the context of this study, these projects are identified as "everyday feminist activism."[2] They represent a second level on which Muslim women operated in their quest for emancipation.

The rate of female literacy in Bhopal only increased from nine to twenty-one women per thousand in the first twenty years of Sultan Jahan Begam's rule (1901-1921).[3] Such a statistic could lead one to deem, as high British officials did, that the reformist process in the state was "pure eyewash."[4] But this judgement would ignore the significance of founding any institution at all for Muslim women at this time. It would also disregard the positive changes that were brought to public opinion and, what British visitors to the state themselves noted,

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[1] *Statistical Abstract for British India from 1923-24 to 1932-33*, cited in Woodsmall, *Moslem Women*, 160. It has become a truism to quote such appalling female literacy statistics when writing of the poor status of Indian women, even though they often hide notable achievements. They are used here to make that point.

[2] This phrase is adopted from Margot Badran, who uses it to describe how early Egyptian female reformers pioneered a public space for women by establishing new female institutions and entering male-dominated domains. Badran, *Feminists*, 26.

[3] C.E. Luard. *Census of India, 1901*. Vol. XIXB Central India. Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Steam Printing Press, 1902, 51; and *Census of India, 1921*. Vol. XVIII Central India. Calcutta: Government Printing, 1923, 59.

[4] Loose papers of the diary of Yvonne Alice Gertrude Fitzroy, private secretary to Lady Reading, 1921-25, 18 Feb., 1923, IOL, Fitzroy Collection, MSS.Eur.E.312/11a.

the enthusiasm of girls who attended school, i.e. women of the next generation, for the new opportunities.[5] In fact, social reform in Bhopal was both deep-rooted and innovative. Schools, clubs and health programs built on existing traditions, in order to bring a limited modernity, just as was advocated in theoretical reformist literature of the state. As will be seen in this and later chapters, however, many of the ultimate accomplishments of these institutions and their graduates were quite different from the founders' aims.

Practical Efforts for the Social Reform of Muslim Women

It was discussed in the previous chapter how men, like Nazir Ahmad and Hali, began to call for female education from the mid-nineteenth century, claiming that it was a prerequisite to the regeneration of the Muslim community. They championed a basic vernacular education for women, to be imparted at home, which would include rudimentary grammar and arithmetic, calligraphy and domestic management. Zenana teaching, along the lines that they suggested, had existed before this time, but it was on the decrease due to the shift of government funding from vernacular to English education. Suitable private tutors, i.e. elderly men or female teachers (*ustanis*), were simply no longer available to teach women in Urdu. As devout Muslims were reluctant to send their girls to either government vernacular girls' schools, where purdah was not maintained, or missionary schools, where secular instruction was accompanied by a healthy dose of the Christian religion, most women ended up with no education at all.[6]

Yet from the 1880s, young Muslims, who were *alumni* or students of English-medium colleges such as Aligarh, began vocalizing their desire for educated wives.[7] Though opposition to girls leaving the house for education remained strong, leaders of the community began responding to the call of the younger generation and founding schools in order to provide an alternative to the services being offered by the missionaries. In the mid-1880s, the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, a social and educational organization in Lahore, started five primary schools for girls in the old city of Lahore. With the avowed aim of countering the efforts of other religious groups and strengthening Islam from within, they offered a "suitable" curriculum for Muslim girls, which included Urdu, Persian, writing, arithmetic, needlework

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[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Minault, "Shaikh Abdullah," 212-214.

[7] See comments of Mustafa Khan in *An Apology for the "New Light,"* quoted in Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 249.

and, most importantly, the Qur'an. Their efforts were obviously successful, since, by 1894, they had opened fifteen schools, each of which was attended by as many as fifty girls. However, they were consistently plagued, as were their successor institutions, by a lack of financial support, trained female teachers and suitable textbooks.[8]

In the early years of the twentieth century, several private efforts were launched from within the Muslim community to spread female education. In several articles on North India, as well as a chapter of her recent book, *Secluded Scholars*, Gail Minault refers, in particular, to the founding of the Victoria Girls' High School by Mian Shah Din and Mian Muhammad Shafi in Lahore in 1906, the Aligarh Zenana Madrasa by Shaikh and Begam 'Abdullah also in 1906, the Muslim Girls' School by Sayyid Karamat Husain in Lucknow in 1912, and the Madrasat ul-Banat by 'Abdul Haq Abbas in Jalandhar in 1926.[9] Other authors have discussed institutions in Bengal, most notably, the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School, inaugurated by Begam Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in Calcutta in 1911.[10] Slightly later efforts to found Muslim girls' schools throughout India by Rashid ul-Khairi in Delhi, Begam Amiruddin in Madras and Nawab Rizvi in Patna, among others, have also received cursory mention in more general studies of Muslim women.[11]

All of these discussions stress the importance for early educationalists of building on traditional norms. Male and female reformers justified their endeavours by claiming that female education was both enjoined by the Qur'an and early Islamic history and necessary for the strengthening of the Islamic community. If girls were provided with suitable training, i.e. of a religious and domestic nature, they would grow up to be better mothers, better wives and better Muslims, thus able to stem the dislocation occurring in the Muslim family. In order to gain the confidence of Muslim parents, efforts were made to portray the girls' schools as an extension of the girls' families. Customary observances were strictly maintained and religious rituals regularly performed. Even Begam Rokeya, whose writing was so revolutionary, found herself bowing to tradition in practice. In fact, certain constraining customs, like purdah, were rendered even stronger by the institutionalizing of their observance at girls' schools. As a result, Minault and other authors conclude that early efforts for women's schooling had

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[8] See Minault, "Purdah's Progress," 87-88.
[9] See Minault, "Purdah's Progress," 88-92; "Shaikh Abdullah," 207-233; "Sayyid Karamat Husain," 155-164; and *Secluded Scholars*, ch. 5.
[10] Hossain, *Rokeya*, ch. 3.
[11] See, for example, Ali, *Emergence*, 118-124.

paradoxical effects. Although they strengthened cultural codes limiting women's sphere of action, they also led to the establishment of broader networks of female communication and fostered women's interest in social service organizations and Urdu journalism.

What is overlooked, or brushed over, in the few articles on women's education and the wider body of material on social reform within the Muslim community is the role of the Indian princes in initiating reformist projects. The authoritarian structure of these states is portrayed, without exception, as upholding and preserving 'feudal' power structures. Few attempts have been made to accentuate the differences between the states or the changes that were made over time. Yet, as was pointed out in articles in *Stridharma*, the journal of the Women's Indian Association, reforms for women often occurred earlier and with more ease in these fiefdoms than they did elsewhere in India. As was stated in the March, 1927 issue, "The Indian States are peculiarly fortunate in being able to effect reforms in social and other conditions, unhampered by the "neutral" attitude of the Government, as they are in British India."[12] Women rulers, including the Begam of Bhopal and the Regent Rani of Jasdan, were particularly lauded for providing a lead to both the British provinces and other Indian states on reformist issues.[13]

With specific reference to Muslim states, it is evident that the largest and most prominent, Hyderabad (Deccan), was at the forefront of introducing Muslim reform. By the late nineteenth century, it boasted several modern, as well as more traditional, state-sponsored schools and colleges, which offered teaching in both English and Urdu, notably the Madrasa-i-Aliya, the Nizam College and the Darul Uloom. Also in existence by this time were the Nampalli Girls' School (later the Women's College of Osmania University) and a scholarship fund enabling women to study abroad, two innovative efforts that were personally advanced by the Nizam. In the early years of the twentieth century, the English-medium Mahbubiya Girls' School, a purdah ladies' club and a women's hospital were also founded in the state.[14] Financial aid was also provided to such institutions by the last Nawab of Bahawalpur, an active patron of the Aligarh Muslim University and the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, as well as the *madrasas* of Deoband and Nadwa.[15] The Raja of Mahmudabad similarly championed

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[12] "The Indian States and Women's Rights," *Stridharma* (Madras), 10 (Mar., 1927), 66.

[13] "Remarkable Reforms under a Woman Ruler" and "A Ranee Temperance Reformer" in *Stridharma* (Madras), 6 (1923), 65, 177.

[14] Bawa, *Last Nizam*, 52-53, 62; and Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 204-206.

[15] Nurul Zaman Ahmad Auj. *Legacy of Cholistan*. Multan: Caravan Book Centre, 1995, 197. I am indebted to Her Highness of Bahawalpur for presenting me with this book.

reformist efforts within the Muslim community, including Sayyid Karamat Hussain's Muslim Girls' School in Lucknow.[16] In supporting these projects, Indian princes were following the lead of more powerful Muslim rulers in the Middle East, including Sultan 'Aziz in Turkey and Khedive Isma'il in Egypt, who had sponsored girls' schools as early as 1863.[17] Bhopal was also part of this tradition.

Reformist Efforts in Bhopal State

The earliest efforts to introduce a state system of education and medical facilities to Bhopal were initiated by Nawab Sikandar Begam around the middle of the nineteenth century. She not only organized a medical department, headed by a qualified Yunani medical officer, but also founded two large schools: Sulimania School, for the education of state inhabitants "in general," though particularly *jagirdars*, and Victoria School, for girls. This latter institution provided technical training in female trades and handicrafts, as well as instruction in basic academic subjects and the Qur'an. Founded by a Muslim woman for girls of both her own and other communities, it appears to have long predated similar efforts anywhere else in India or even the Middle East. Comparable institutions such as the Faizunnessa Girls' School in East Bengal or the Suffiyya Girls' School in Cairo, which were established by Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani, a wealthy zamindar, and Tcheshme Hanim, the third wife of Khedive Isma'il, respectively, were not founded until 1873.[18] By that point, the Victoria School was a thriving entity, as Sikandar had been able to attract large numbers of students through financial inducements.[19]

Sikandar was also one of India's first rulers to be interested in providing comprehensive training to her successors. Sultan Jahan Begam notes in both her journal, written shortly after her grandmother's death, and her autobiography that her "Nani Sahiba" was highly concerned with the matter of her education. In order to prepare her for the rigorous demands of statesmanship, highly qualified tutors were hired to instruct her in the Qur'an and its translation, handwriting, arithmetic, English, Arabic, Persian and Pushtu, as well as fencing and horseriding. The offering of lessons in English to a Indian Muslim girl at this time was particularly extraordinary. In fact, no one else in the state, either male or female,

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[16] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 222.
[17] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 28, 46.
[18] Badran, *Feminists*, 9; and Amin, *Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal*, 149-150.
[19] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. I, 20; and *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, 86.

was competent in the language, so visiting English gentlemen were asked to test her progress. This exhaustive process of home training, though unusual in India, was comparable to that provided to upper-class girls of the same era in Turkey, who learned French, history and philosophy, among other subjects, from foreign governesses.[20] Sultan Jahan's education was continued by her mother, after Sikandar's death, but, as she notes herself, it was less intensive, focussing more on domestic and official duties, than scholarly knowledge.[21]

Shah Jahan Begam, ruler of Bhopal from 1868 to 1901, initiated further reforms to the state, on modern lines, as well as developing the projects of her mother. Sulimania School was improved through the creation of separate language classes, including English, and an extensive library. During her reign, it rose to the status of a high school, and was affiliated with Calcutta University in 1892, though Sultan Jahan noted that it remained "ill-managed and ill-attended" due to the prejudice against "new learning and new methods."[22] Impressed by the achievements of the Victoria School, Shah Jahan also opened another girls' school, where lessons were given in embroidery and other needlework. She also founded a school for orphans, a technical school for boys and several schools for the study of oriental languages, the most acclaimed being the Madrasa-i-Jahangiria. Teachers and supervisors were also appointed to establish village schools in order to spread the benefits of education to the countryside. The Nawab Begam also promoted education in the state by offering generous scholarships and issuing a declaration, announcing that all government employees would be required to hold a certificate from a school or college.[23] These educational initiatives brought Bhopal closer to the standard of more advanced Hindu states, like neighbouring Gwalior, which had promoted similar schemes earlier in the century.[24]

European medicine, on the other hand, was introduced to Bhopal state by Shah Jahan Begam even before similar moves were taken elsewhere in the Central India Agency. As well as appointing native *hakims* to each district to treat villagers, she also hired several European physicians to set up dispensaries throughout the state, form a special department to encourage vaccination against small pox, organize a leper hospital at Sehore and establish a well-

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[20] Zeyneb Hanoum. *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions*. Ed. and intro. by Grace Ellison. London: Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd., 1913, 98-100

[21] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. I, 32-40; and *Diary of Sultan Jahan Begam* [Urdu mss], *c.*1873-74, 4.

[22] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. I, 284. The running of this institution is described in more detail by Shah Jahan Begam herself in *Tāj-ul Ikbāl*, 193.

[23] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, 86-89.

[24] See, for example, C.E. Luard. *Gwalior State Gazetteer: Texts and Tables*. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1908, 120-121.

equipped hospital, named after the Prince of Wales, in Bhopal city.[25] In order to commemorate the visit in 1891 of Lord and Lady Landsdowne, the viceregal couple, to the state, a purdah women's hospital was also opened, which was placed under the control of a qualified European lady doctor. To open an institution of this type in the late nineteenth century was a highly innovative move for a native ruler, as the first zenana hospital in India had only been founded in 1875 by the Methodist Mission in Bareilly.[26] Improvements were added to the Bhopal hospital throughout the decade in the form of a class for the training of midwives, modern equipment and several new wings. The arrangements made for the treatment of women received the commendations of the Lady Dufferin Fund, when inspectors were sent to the state in 1895.[27]

Shah Jahan Begam also brought social and religious reform to the women of Bhopal, by introducing separate spheres of female activity so that they could participate in the social, cultural and economic life of the state. Her involvement with a circle of female poets has already been mentioned in the previous chapter. Similarly, she walled in reserved portions of certain mosques, so that veiled women could join public prayers on feast days. Perhaps, her most novel move, however, was the establishment of a *pakka* bazaar for the exclusive use of women. It is evident that such events, referred to as *mina* bazaars, were held once a year during the Nauroz festival at the Mughal court.[28] But the Begam of Bhopal made them a regular event, thus fostering the economic independence of the poor craftswomen of her dominions. As the market was a popular meeting spot, it also encouraged social interaction by women outside the family unit.[29] In this way, Shah Jahan Begam laid the foundations for the many modernist reforms introduced during her daughter's reign.

Though the primary proponents of reform in Bhopal state were the ruling Begams, a separate reformist influence did exist in the form of a small Christian community, consisting of British administrators, Quaker missionaries and Indian converts. British policy-makers in the region asserted that imperial interests would be best served if no attempts were made by

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[25] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, 69-71. For comparisons with neighbouring states, see *Imperial Gazetteer of India: Central India*. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1908, 74.

[26] Woodsmall, *Moslem Women*, 304.

[27] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. I, 246.

[28] Apparently the Emperor Jahangir met Nur Jahan at one of these fairs in March, 1611. They were first held during the reign of Humayun. Ellison Banks Findly. *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 36-37.

[29] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, 82. Also see the fictionalized account, "Pari Bazar," by Shrimati Asma Mannan Ansari in *The Glance* (Bhopal), Dec., 1964, reprinted in Ali, *Bhopal*, ap. 2.

this group to disrupt the social fabric of the native states.[30] Nevertheless, Western-style reforms were introduced to Bhopal by local officials after the signing of the Treaty of 1818. Perhaps most influential was the Agency Surgeon, who managed the Sehore Agency Hospital and toured around a circuit of dispensaries, promoting vaccination and other forms of Western medicine.[31] Other officers strongly advocated the growth of education, founding well-attended institutions within the Sehore Cantonment, which included a school and hostel for boys at the primary and secondary levels and a vernacular school for girls. Opened in 1865, this latter institution offered instruction by native Christian and Hindu mistresses to around eighty girls in the 'three Rs,' needlework and the recitation of poetry. The quality of teaching was, however, very low; an education inspector noted in 1913 that one mistress "did not know the meaning of difficult words," while the other two "had no idea as to how many tens there were in 25."[32]

More popular than the government initiatives, though also under 'foreign' direction, were the reformist projects of Quaker missionaries. The Friends' Foreign Missionary Association (FFMA) entered Bhopal state in 1890, when they were invited by the Political Agent, Colonel Wylie, to assist in the opening of a leper hospital near Sehore. Soon after, resident missionaries, most of whom were women, turned their attention to female education, opening girls' schools in the native quarter and the mission cantonment. These institutions catered to both poor Hindu and Muslim children by offering instruction within a purdah environment in Hindi and Urdu, arithmetic, domestic economy and industrial work, as well as scripture.[33] From 1901, Quaker women also toured the homes of wealthy families in Sehore and Bhopal city, giving lessons to the wives and daughters of the household, a practice commonly known as 'zenana visiting.' In doing this, they fulfilled a demand from officials of the court and other prosperous Bhopali citizens for female tutors, who had the skills and mobility to provide home instruction for women in strict purdah.[34] In addition to these

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[30] This policy was elucidated by Sir John Malcolm, the first British administrator in the region, in *A Memoir of Central India*. Vol. II. London: Kingsbury, Parbury, & Allen, 1823, 266.

[31] R.J. Crosthwaite, AGG, to H.M. Durand, PSV, 25 Apr., 1892, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1197.

[32] Pandit Sukhdeo Tiwari, Special Educational Officer of CIA. *Report on the State of Education in the Central India Agency*. Indore: CIA (Govt) Press, 1913, 65; and Ram Vallabh, Second Master, Sehore High School. "Report of the Scholarship Examination of the Girls' School Sehore," NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 57, 1901.

[33] A. Taylor to H. Catford, 8 Mar., 1923, FSC/IN/4; and A.P. Fowler. "The Children's Page: The Great Day" in *The Quaker at Home and Abroad* (London), 7 (Jan., 1912), 9.

[34] For a description of zenana visiting in Bhopal state, see E. Joy Hodgkin. "In the City of Bhopal," *The Friend* (London), 52 (10 May, 1912), 290; and Louisa Walker. "In the Zenanas," *Workers at Home and Abroad* (London), 9 (May, 1914), 68.

exclusively female activities, Quaker missionaries in Bhopal also maintained a boys' school, offered support to the native Christian community and occasionally undertook camping tours for the purpose of 'preaching the Gospel.' Proselytizing was never, however, their primary ambition; unlike missionaries of other denominations, they considered it more important to offer "education and fellowship" in a manner akin to that of Indian reformers, than to gain converts.[35] Such a sympathetic aim endeared them to the ruling Begam, who not only made close friendships with the female missionaries, but also allowed their work among Bhopali women to continue, in parallel to her own efforts, throughout her twenty-five year reign.

Early Educational Reforms in Bhopal State, 1901-1912

Following her ascension to the throne in 1901, Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam was prevented from focussing on reformist activities by the immediate difficulty of reconstructing an administration that had virtually collapsed during the final years of her mother's reign.[36] By late 1903, however, she was ready to direct her attention to the educational development of her people. As was noted in the previous chapter, the Begam's primary interest was Muslim female education, a topic that she felt had been sadly neglected. Though she could find no acceptable archetype to copy, she was determined to raise a physical monument to her ideals, and so she established the Sultania Girls' School in an annex of the Taj Mahal palace in 1903. It began with 140 girls on the roll, an amazing turnout when compared to the seventeen students, who first attended the Aligarh Zenana Madrasa three years later, or the eight students, who first attended the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School in 1911.[37] Yet Sultan Jahan Begam had been faced with obstacles from the start. When she held a public meeting to publicize the project, she found that certain conservative elements of both her council and her people were highly prejudiced to the idea, responding with an "ominous silence" when she called for volunteers to send their daughters. Though they remained sceptical, this group was

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[35] Louisa Walker to Dr. Hodgkin, 20 Feb., 1920, FSC/IN/3. For a discussion of other female missionaries in India, who remained firmly geared to promoting both the Christian religion and Western 'civilization,' see Ruth Compton Brouwer. *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and Indian Missions, 1876-1914*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990; and Kumari Jayawardena. *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia during British Colonial Rule*. London: Routledge, 1995.

[36] Sultan Jahan Begam inherited a state in which twenty-three per cent of the population had perished during the great famine of 1899, the judicial department was in ruins and the treasury had been squandered, particularly by Shah Jahan Begam's late husband and other government officers during her last fatal illness. To the admiration of local British officers, she was soon able to improve this situation by recentralizing power in her own hands and personally directing the overhaul of the administration. See chapter IV.

[37] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 239; and Hossain, *Rokeya*, 157.

ultimately forced to acquiese tinthe scheme, since, as she pointed out herself, it emanated from the ruler of the state.

As their primary concern was the maintenance of adequate purdah arrangements, a problem with which she was sympathetic, the Begam decided that the state would supply carefully guarded closed conveyances to transport the girls from home to school. The covered bullock-carts provided were dark and airless, causing fear and sickness among their young passengers. Nevertheless, they became an inevitable aspect of school girls' daily routine.[38] A second problem was the lack of suitable teaching staff. The Begam ruled out European mistresses on the basis that they had inadequate knowledge of the Urdu language and, therefore, could not develop a "close communion" with their students. Trained Muslim women instructors, on the other hand, were almost impossible to find. Sultan Jahan was able to manage, initially, by hiring three women, one from Delhi and two from Bhopal, who had been educated at home, as well as a "pious old man" as superintendent.[39] The final problem she faced was the lack of an appropriate curriculum. Though she lauded the British government for opening schools for girls, she rejected their program of instruction as it did not sufficiently address the domestic and religious requirements of the Muslim community. Again, she 'made do' with the resources she had, sketching out a rough program which included lessons in the Qur'an and its translation, Urdu, arithmetic, geography and domestic economy.[40] These various difficulties continued to plague Sultan Jahan Begam, as well as other early female educationalists in India and the Middle East, including Begam Rokeya in Bengal and Nabawiyah Musa in Egypt, well into the 1920s and beyond, though methods of coping were developed, as will be seen.[41]

Girls' education was her main priority, but Sultan Jahan Begam was also concerned with the educational backwardness of the male population of her state. Though the long-running Sulimania High School boasted a staggering enrolment of seven hundred pupils in 1904, no more than twenty students had actually passed the Matriculation examination and

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[38] Woodsmall, *Moslem Women*, 161.

[39] Little is known about this initial staff beyond their names: the women teachers were Mughlani Khanam, Nazir Bi and Zainab Bi, and the superintendent was Maulvi Syed Mohammed 'Ali Rizvi.

[40] This discussion of the founding of the Sultania Girls' School is based on Sultan Jahan's own account in *Account*, vol. II, 150-153.

[41] Sultan Jahan Begam listed these same problems in a speech to staff members of the Sultania Girls' School in 1917. See Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 150-154. As they did not have the resources of the ruler of a state, Begam Rokeya and Nabawiya Musa also had the additional problem of finding enough funds to pay for teachers, conveyances and scholarships. Hossain, *Rokeya*, 146-176; and Badran, *Feminists*, 56-60, 144.

none had gone on to complete a degree program.[42] The Begam's first response was to found the Alexandra Nobles' School in 1903 for boys of the upper classes, including her own son, Hamidullah Khan, whom she found to be "slaves of old customs," "devotees of ignorance" and "ardent admirers of show and extravagance"- everything she abhorred.[43] Next, she sought to reform the existing institutions for boys, an effort that was obviously successful, since, by 1906, it was reported by C.S. Bayley, the Political Agent at Bhopal, that, under the close attention of both the ruler and the new Director of Public Instruction, Munshi Moeinuddin Ahmed, the boys' schools had "advanced rapidly." The Jahangiria School was particularly well-managed under the new headmaster, a graduate of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College.[44] Slowly, the "old and mouldy" teachers of her mother's reign were being replaced by men with a modernist approach and, more often than not, a degree from Aligarh.

Sultan Jahan Begam also sought to update the institutions for girls founded by her grandmother and mother, the Victoria School and the Bilqisia Orphanage. Though they had both initially been very progressive institutions, they had declined, during the last years of Shah Jahan Begam's reign, to such a point that, when the new ruler visited them in 1904, she found the number of students to be less than the number of staff.[45] Under a Eurasian lady superintendent, Mrs. Sculpthorpe, they were rapidly revived. By the end of the next school year, 180 girls were being taught reading, writing, arithmetic, embroidery and needlework, as well as the Qur'an and Islamic theology, if they were Muslim. Several articles prepared by the girls were even awarded prizes when they were sent to the exhibition of female industry at the Muhammadan Educational Conference held in Aligarh in December, 1905.[46]

Though the Victoria School was open to girls of every caste and religion, it was designated as serving girls of the lower and middle classes. In order to subsidize their low tuition payments, part of the students' work was sold to help fund the school, just as was the practice in orphanages and industrial schools run by the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam in

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[42] Zafar Omar. *Administration Report of Bhopal State (1904-1905).* Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1905, 18. According to condemnatory reports by the Inspector, Bhagwan Das, headmaster of the Sehore High School, this poor performance in boys' schools was due to the fact that discipline was lax, textbooks were unavailable, personal cleanliness was lacking, and the standard of teaching was poor. See reports on the Bhopal (boys') schools from the autumn months of 1903, 1904 and 1905 in NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 69, 1903.

[43] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 153.

[44] "Review of Her Highness of Bhopal's 1905-06 Administration Report" by C.S. Bayley, PA, in NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 100/1, 1906.

[45] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 182-183.

[46] Zafar Omar. *Administration Report of Bhopal State (1905-1906).* Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1906, 21.

Punjab.[47] The school continued to advance fairly well throughout the Begam's reign, although Mrs. Katherine Johory, an Indian Christian, who was active in the Quaker community of the state, brought the most success during her pre-war administration. Impressed by her efforts, Sultan Jahan Begam also placed her in charge of a new school for girls, the Madrasa Bilqisia, founded in 1912. It was located in the centre of the city, so that poor Muslim girls could attend it without difficulty, even though no conveyance was provided. As it was intended to draw on a poorer clientele, each of the nearly sixty students was provided with a scholarship from the state treasury. This institution, like the first girls' schools in Turkey, offered the most basic instruction necessary to prepare Muslim girls as better wives and mothers: lessons in needlework and the Qur'an.[48] Undoubtedly, this accounts for why the Madrasa Bilqisia, along with the Victoria School, achieved more success than early institutions for less privileged girls in Egypt; they recognized poorer women's roles as both housewives and wage-earners, rather than offering a strictly academic curriculum that was unsuited to their socio-economic conditions.[49]

The Nawab Begam had first turned her attention to the educational uplift of less privileged women as early as 1905, when reformists like Shaikh 'Abdullah were still making exclusive appeals to *ashraf* women.[50] As was discussed in the previous chapter, Sultan Jahan Begam believed that it was essential to provide widows and other poor women with a means to make their own living, so that they would not become dependent on charity or the resources of the state. She, thus, founded a female school of arts, called the Widows' Industrial School, in May, 1905, to teach poor women useful skills such as sewing and needlework. Unlike her other endeavours, this school neither started well, nor grew in popularity. The Begam was only able to increase attendance marginally from the initial twenty-nine students by making enrolment a necessary condition to poor women being imparted other financial aid.[51] By 1909, it was agreed that the school had not proved a success. The widows who were meant to attend were described as "too old to learn anything

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[47] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 177.

[48] *Administration Report of the Bhopal State for 1 October, 1913 to 30 September, 1914*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1919, 15. For Turkish comparisons, see Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 28.

[49] Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 125.

[50] Minault discusses Shaikh 'Abdullah's exclusive appeal to a *sharif* clientele in "Shaikh Abdullah," 217.

[51] Report on the progress of the Asfia Technical School given by Fatima Begam, 17 Sept., 1926, in Muhammad Amin Zuberi. *Asr-i-Jadid (The New Epoch)*. Bombay: The Times of India Press, 1929, 45.

and too lazy to come regularly."[52] Evidently, public opinion in Bhopal had not progressed far enough to accept such a radical institution. Only if the ruling Begam had shown considerable enthusiasm could greater interest have been stimulated in the project, but, at this point, her focus remained on elite education. Though it was feared that the institution would have to be closed, it carried on in a haphazard way under the supervision of Mrs. G. Baksh, also the Superintendent of the Sultania Girls' School, until the early 1920s.

Sultan Jahan Begam was aware of the diverging needs, not only of members of different classes, but also of different communities. She expressed, in her autobiography, that Hindu girls were just as much in need of education, as their Muslim sisters. There was little point, however, in sending them to a Muslim girls' school, as they would not receive instruction in their own religion, an essential part of education as she saw it.[53] In 1907, a school, called the Birjisia Kania Patshala, was, thus, opened for the exclusive benefit of Hindu girls of her dominion. However, it does not appear that this institution ever received the attention lavished on other institutions, and its attendance remained low.[54] Like the Widows' Industrial School, it was placed under the jurisdiction of Mrs. Baksh, who had little time for its improvement, as she was also the Superintendent of the Begam's 'pet' institution, the Sultania Girls' School.

Throughout the first half of Sultan Jahan Begam's reign, the Sultania School continued to progress under her personal supervision. In the first years after its establishment, however, it endured within the guidelines described above: instruction was offered in the '3 Rs,' theology and needlework to "respectable" Muslim girls, whose honour was protected through the provision of purdah carriages and accommodation for the school within the palace. Though attendance dropped slightly, it remained high at well over 100 pupils.[55] In 1907, it began to develop further. Miss M.W. Chinnappa, an educated native Christian of the Madras presidency, was appointed to bring her knowledge of managing schools on "modern lines" to Bhopal. She introduced geography, Persian and rudimentary English to the syllabus, before instituting the Allahabad University Urdu Middle School course in 1908. To teach above the primary level in a school for Muslim girls must have been a radical innovation at this time;

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[52] *Administration Report of the Bhopal State for 23 March, 1908 to 22 March, 1909*. Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1910, 21.

[53] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 265-266.

[54] The highest attendance noted was 32 pupils in 1913-1914. *Administration Report, 1913-1914*, 15

[55] Omar, *Administration Report, 1904-1905*, 20.

neither the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School in Bengal, the Aligarh Girls' School in UP, nor the long-running Saniyya School in Egypt reached this standard until nearly a decade later.[56]

In the following year, the Sultania School was placed under the direction of Mrs. Baksh, the above-mentioned Indian Christian woman, who also supervised the Widows' Industrial School and the Birjisia Kanya Patshala. She appears to have substantially improved the standard of the school, gaining the respect of the pupils, her noble employer and honoured visitors. When Lady Minto visited the institution in late 1909, she remarked on how accomplished, particularly in English, and well-behaved the students were. Discipline was obviously strict; the Vicereine commented that, when the ruling Begam said "salaam" upon entering the school, each of the girls clasped her hands and touched her forehead "with military precision."[57] Mrs. Baksh also provided more thorough instruction on the lines of the Urdu Middle School course, and four girls were sent to sit the examinations in Allahabad in 1911. This was the first time Bhopali girls had ever been sent for university examinations. Technical teaching in the school was also improved by Mrs. Baksh, an effort which was rewarded when Sultania students won medals at the Industrial Exhibitions held at Nagpur and Lahore.[58] This parallel development of raising academic standards and improving technical instruction reflects Sultan Jahan's insistence on building on customary roles.

The Sultania Girls' School was able to become established much as a result of the efforts of industrious women, like Mrs. Baksh and her predecessors. However, it was the patronage of the Nawab Begam that was the crucial factor. She was able to guarantee, above all, that it never had the financial problems that afflicted similar endeavours. While Shaikh 'Abdullah, Begam Rokeya and other less elite educationalists were constantly busied with seeking financial assistance from both the British government and private individuals, the Begam was able to unilaterally sanction the use of state funds to pay for teachers, supplies, conveyances and scholarships. As she was both the leader of a state and a leading member of the Muslim community, her involvement also brought a respectability to the project, which was instrumental in overcoming the anxiety of conservative Muslims.[59] Sultan Jahan Begam

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[56] Hossain, *Rokeya*, 158; Minault, "Shaikh Abdullah," 230; and Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 129.

[57] Mary, Countess of Minto. *India, Minto and Morley*. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd, 1935, 348.

[58] Sultan Jahan Begam. *An Account of My Life*. Vol. III. Tr. by C.H. Payne. Bombay: The Times Press, 1927, 125.

[59] A similar combination of factors contributed to the success of the earliest Muslim girls' schools in Bengal: the Faizunnessa School (founded 1873) and the Suhrawardy School (founded 1909). Established by Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani, a wealthy zamindar, and Khujista Akhtar Begam, mother of prominent politician and lawyer, Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy, they progressed, at least initially, because of their founders' "social standing, political sway and financial independence." Hossain, *Rokeya*, 128.

fostered this feeling by remaining an active participant in the running of the school. She not only received frequent progress reports and helped to hire the staff, but she also regularly visited the school to distribute prizes and speak with the pupils.[60] As a result of both the personal interest taken by the Begam and the location of the school in one of her palaces, Bhopali parents, like those who sent their girls to the 'Abdullahs' school in Aligarh, were made to feel that their daughters were joining the "extended family" of the founder.[61] This belief eased their worries about sending their girls for education outside the home.

Sultan Jahan also gained the confidence of the more puritanical Muslim community by emphasizing domestic training, religious education and the maintenance of purdah restrictions. She encouraged such traditional values among the students themselves, during her visits to the school. In a speech at a prize-giving ceremony in 1911, for example, she commanded the girls to "seek diligently to acquire knowledge," as it was a "woman's wealth." However, she stressed that the object of their education was not to prepare them to undertake the duties of men, but to train them as "capable housewives and good mothers," roles which received the approbation of God.[62] Her sensitivity to orthodox opinion resulted in, not only the success of the girls' school in Bhopal city, but also the founding of a similar institution in Sehore in 1912. When an outside inspector visited the Sehore girls' schools in January of the following year, he remarked that this school was far more popular, especially with Muslims, than the equivalent British government institution, as it offered covered conveyances and traditional religious education, as well as several scholarships.[63]

The extensive efforts made by Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam to introduce educational reform to her state in the first half of her long reign, though part of a tradition in both the Muslim community and the princely states, were certainly exceptional. She founded or developed a multitude of different modern institutions, as discussed above, as well as several purely theological institutions, including the Madrasa Ahmedia and the Madrasa Huffaz, in which traditional Maulvis imparted instruction on the Qur'an and the Muslim law books. The initial reaction of Bhopalis to modern education was inimical, or apathetic, at best. It was recorded in Bhopal's administration report of 1905-1906 that people feared sending their

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[60] For a description of these visits, see Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 73, 120.
[61] For comparisons in the Aligarh context, see Minault, "Shaikh Abdullah," 228ff.
[62] Speech given by Sultan Jahan Begam at a prize-giving ceremony at the Sultania Girls' School on 14 February, 1911, quoted in *Account*, vol. III, 121.
[63] Tiwari, *Report*, 65

sons, never mind their daughters, to institutions, which taught such strange subjects as English, history and mathematics, and brought them in contact with undesirable influences.[64] When faced with such a conservative public, progress, especially for institutions like the Widows' Industrial School, was inevitably slow. But through the constant efforts of the ruling Begam and her enlightened staff, public opinion slowly, but steadily, began to change.

Further Educational Reforms in Bhopal State, 1912-1926

Though the early years of her reign were her most active in terms of educational reform in the state, Sultan Jahan Begam did persist in introducing modernist education, often in a more progressive style, from about the time of the first World War. It appears that this development was initiated by an influx of 'outsiders' into Bhopal. Not only did her youngest son, Hamidullah Khan, return from Aligarh College at this time, accompanied by many of his friends and other Aligarh 'Old Boys,' but the Begam herself also began to attract activists of the younger generation. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, she provided extensive patronage, in the form of both stipends and government employment, to educated or defenceless women, both of her own family and from outside the state, who had been ostracized by conservative society. As a result, Bhopal became a refuge for progressive women of all communities. Some of these women, including the sisters of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and numerous European and native Christian women, lived and worked in Bhopal for extended periods, influencing the reformist development of the state through their appointment to the state educational or medical service. Others such as Sarojini Naidu and the Faizi sisters, who had received a foreign education before becoming active in women's social and educational causes at a national level, visited Bhopal intermittently, offering assistance with special events and fresh ideas about women's emancipation.[65]

After founding and reforming the many schools in her state, the Begam realized that Bhopal also needed supplementary educational institutions; as she wrote in her autobiography, "having created in my subjects a thirst for knowledge, it [was] only right that I should furnish them with the means of satisfying that thirst."[66] She, thus, opened both a library and a

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[64] Omar, *Administration Report, 1905-1906*, 20.

[65] Sarojini Naidu received a scholarship from the Nizam of Hyderabad to study at London and Cambridge, after completing her basic education in Madras. Similarly, the Faizi sisters completed their education at a girls' boarding school in Britain, after several years at a missionary school in Bombay. For further biographical information, see chapter I.

[66] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 201.

museum between 1909 and 1912, the latter of which was evidently to be used on a regular basis by women, as well as men, as it was open exclusively to purdah ladies on Wednesdays and included a walled purdah garden in the grounds. A library had, in fact, existed in the city since the last years of her mother's reign, but it was not until this time that it was properly established as the Hamidia Library and provided with a suitable building, where provision was made for the extensive oriental and western collections and a public reading room. A trained librarian, Mr. B. Ghosal, was also appointed to care for the collection and compile a catalogue, with the assistance of staff from the Bodleian Library in Oxford.[67] He was similarly placed in charge of the King Edward Museum, an institution that was open to purdah ladies during special all-India women's events in the city. Though it claimed to be a "thoroughly representative provincial museum,"[68] it housed very few items of interest to female visitors beyond a life-sized embroidered portrait of the ruling Begam.[69]

A third supplementary educational institution started by the ruling Begam at this time was the Urdu women's magazine, *Zil us-Sultan*. Founded in 1913 under the editorship of Muhammad Amin Zuberi, it aimed to preserve and extend fragile literacy skills among newly-educated women in purdah by providing suitable and informative reading material at a time when there was little available. Following the model of *Khatun* of Aligarh, it included notices about women's meetings and girls' schools, speeches by prominent Aligarh reformers and reports on various educational conferences, as well as articles on female education and health reform. The project was well-received by women of the state, who not only paid the nominal fee to subscribe to the journal, but also contributed articles for publication. Such a reaction suggests that *Zil us-Sultan*, like other women's journals, including *Tahzib un-Niswan* and *'Ismat*, was valued both as a source of information and as an outlet for self-expression. It continued publication on a monthly basis until the early 1930s, when the project folded, apparently as a result of the death of Sultan Jahan Begam and the subsequent dismissal of Zuberi.[70]

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[67] *Administration Report of Bhopal State from 1 October, 1912 to 30 September, 1913*. Bhopal: Qudsia Press, 1916, 22.

[68] *Ibid.*, 21-22.

[69] Begam Humayon Mirza, *Roznamchah*, 9.

[70] A woefully incomplete collection of *Zil us-Sultan* is available at the library of the Aligarh Muslim University. For information about publication and circulation, see letters from Sayyid Iftikhar Alam, manager of *Zil us-Sultan*, to Mrs. Davis and others in NAI(B), BSR No. 2 (B. 56), 1915. Zuberi was dismissed from the Bhopal civil service shortly after the death of Sultan Jahan Begam, as her successor, Hamidullah Khan, considered him to be too devoted to his previous master. Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 29 Oct., 1995.

Like women in other princely states, notably Baroda, Sultan Jahan Begam also became a more fervent proponent of technical and practical education for both sexes in this period. Tailoring and boot-making classes had been provided for boys at the Jahangiria School from 1907-08, but it was not until 1916 that a full fledged industrial school for boys, the Habibia Technical School, was established in Bhopal. Under the supervision of Mr. Joshi, a graduate of the Central Technical Institute in Bombay, it offered courses in mechanical engineering, carpentry and cabinet making, coach building and motor car mechanics.[71] An effort was similarly made to resuscitate the Widows' Industrial School, the primary technical training institution for women, which had been floundering since its inception in 1905. Its name was changed in the pre-war years to Asfia Technical School in an attempt to lift its image, but it was not until 1922 that a thorough restructuring of the institution was made. Grants were provided to students, a system of paying wages for completed work was instituted, and classes in new methods of embroidery were introduced. By 1925, instruction was provided by ten mistresses, half of whom had been sent to study in Hyderabad, in twelve branches of female industry, including gold thread work, Arabian embroidery, woolen knitting, bead work, *chikan*, silk embroidery, soap making, cloth weaving and spinning. Nearly a hundred students were attending, and several medals had been awarded for their work at industrial exhibitions.[72] The school, thus, came to resemble the more elaborate professional training institutions being established in Cairo in connection with the Egyptian Feminist Union such as the Ecole Professionelle et Ménagère.[73] By encouraging the revival of indigenous arts and crafts in place of imported manufactured goods, it also displayed a rare unity of purpose with Gandhi's *swadeshi* movement, as was more often seen in the writings of Begam Rokeya in Bengal.[74]

These changes in the Asfia Technical School reflected not only the increased interest of the ruling Begam, but also the new management. Fatima Begam and Abru Begam, sisters of the renowned Congressman, Maulana Azad, had been appointed as Superintendent and Honorary Supervisor of the institution in May, 1922. Like their younger brother, they had spent their early childhood in the Hijaz, learning Arabic and the Qur'an. When the family

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[71] Addresses given at the opening ceremony of Habibia Technical School by both Sultan Jahan and Nasrullah Khan, as well as a detailed description of the institution, are available in NAI(B), BSR No. 8 (B. 29), 1916.

[72] Report on the progress of the Asfia Technical School given by Fatima Begam, 17 Sept., 1926, in Zuberi, *Asr-i-Jadid*, 46-47. For comparisons in the context of Baroda, see the Maharani of Baroda and S.M. Mitra. *The Position of Women in Indian Life*. London, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911, 275-280.

[73] Badran, *Feminists*, 100.

[74] See Rokeya's "Endi Shilpa" [The Art of Endi, 1921], discussed in Hossain, *Rokeya*, 217-218.

moved to Calcutta in 1898, when the girls were fourteen and twelve, respectively, they were educated at home, alongside their brothers, apparently in the Qur'an, *hadith* and *fiqh*, as well as the rational sciences.[75] Despite this highly academic upbringing, their educational efforts for women in Bhopal were of a much more conventional nature, seemingly reflecting the influence of the ruling Begam. However, they also pushed at the boundaries of traditional female education by offering instruction, in particular, to women of the lower classes. This is reflected in Fatima Begam's enthusiastic work at the Asfia Technical School. Abru Begam, similarly, made courageous efforts for non-elite uplift, which included personal supervision of both the Zenana Poor House and the Muslim girls' orphanage in Bhopal.[76]

The growing concern of Sultan Jahan Begam and her staff with the education of less privileged members of society is also reflected in the passage of the Compulsory Education Act in 1920, which intended to introduce free and compulsory education to children throughout the state. Previous to this time, the Begam had maintained nearly fifty village schools, two of which admitted girls and two of which taught in English, providing free instruction, some to the middle school level, in the Qur'an, Urdu, Persian, Hindi and arithmetic.[77] Although this represented a substantial achievement, the new program was a by far more radical effort. It was hailed in the Muslim press as a "triumph", since similar ventures had been introduced in only one other princely state, Baroda, and not British India.[78] Within a year, five institutions, attended by six hundred pupils, had been opened in Bhopal city to provide instruction to those boys, aged seven to fourteen years, who were required to attend school.[79] Several more schools, for boys and girls, were introduced to the capital and regional centres as part of this program in subsequent years, some of which offered instruction to the secondary level.

Despite the increased attention to the uplift of lower classes, educational schemes in Bhopal continued to be directed primarily at the elites. State funding was poured into the Alexandra High School, an institution to which attendance remained restricted to the sons of

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[75] This meagre information is deduced from *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography*, written by Ian Henderson Douglas and edited by Gail Minault and Christian Troll. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.
[76] Abru Begam's efforts were commended in a "Short speech delivered by Her Highness in the Ladies' Club," in *Decennial Report*, 92. They were condemned, however, by the Hindu Mahasabha in 1931, as she was said to force orphans to embrace Islam. See cutting from the *Tribune* (Lahore), 16 Dec., 1931, in IOR, CR, R/1/1/2234.
[77] Zafar Omar. *Administration Report of Bhopal State (1906-07).* Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1907, 27; and *Administration Report, 1913-1914*, 13.
[78] See cutting from the *Muslim Herald* (Bombay), 26 Jan., 1917 in NAI(ND), GOI, F&P, Apr., 1917, No. 13.
[79] "Administration Report of 1920" in NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 289, 1920.

jagirdars, nobles and high officials, for science classes, a boarding house and a well-paid European headmaster from Cambridge. These benefits were bestowed on Alexandra, despite the fact that the Jahangiria High School and the Sulimania School, catering to a less privileged clientele, provided instruction to nearly seven times as many students and achieved greater academic success.[80] Despite these discrepancies, both high schools in Bhopal were more closely connected with the India-wide movement for Muslim reform, when they were affiliated to the Aligarh Muslim University, recently raised to full university status, in 1923, as opposed to the government institution at Allahabad or the proposed Board of High School and Intermediate Education in Central India.[81]

Efforts were also made to further develop the Sultania Girls' School. It had proved itself academically in 1916 when Aliya Khatun, a student at the school, had obtained outstanding grades in the Allahabad middle school examination, but, in other ways, it remained limited in scope. In January, 1917, a substantial step forward was taken with the establishment of a boarding house, like that which had been opened by Sultan Jahan Begam at the Aligarh Girls' School in 1914, and a teachers' training class. These new additions aimed to counter problems that had plagued Muslim female education from the beginning by strengthening purdah restrictions and producing qualified teachers from among the elite. As in Aligarh, the boarding house was also portrayed as improving standards of punctuality, obedience and cleanliness among girl pupils within the framework of an extended family; Mrs. Baksh, headmistress of Sultania, was 'mother' to all her students, providing both affection and proper precautions to protect their honour.[82] A further improvement to purdah restrictions was later made in 1923, when the old shrouded bullock-carts that had provided conveyance to the girl students since the school's inception were replaced with curtained motor lorries. This more comfortable and convenient form of transport was being introduced to Muslim girls' schools throughout India at this time, although animal-drawn carts and carriages were not replaced entirely, even in the towns, until later in the century.[83]

By the late 1910s, the major problem that remained in Muslim girls' schools was the

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[80] See *Administration Report, 1912-1913*, 20; and *Administration Report, 1913-1914*, 14.
[81] Liakat Husain. "Administration Report of 1923" in NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 206, 1923; and Qazi 'Ali Haidar Abbasi, PS, Bhopal, to C.E. Luard, PA, 22 Aug., 1923, NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 7/23, 1921.
[82] Sultan Jahan Begam's speech to staff members of the Sultania Girls' School at the opening of the boarding house and training class in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 150-153. For comparisons with Aligarh, see Begam 'Abdullah's speech at the opening ceremony of the Aligarh Girls' School hostel, in 'Abdullah, *Riport*, 16-17.
[83] See, for example, Hossain, *Rokeya*, 175.

inappropriateness of the curriculum. Despite nearly ten years of effort, neither a satisfactory syllabus, nor a sufficient number of textbooks had been prepared by the Muslim community in India, although a modified curriculum with texts on household management had been instituted in state girls' schools in Egypt.[84] The Begam of Bhopal raised this issue in her speech to the staff of the Sultania Girls' School on the occasion of the opening of the boarding house, chiding her audience with the reminder that the Hindu community was far more advanced in this respect; not only had they prepared an adequate curriculum, but they were also making full efforts to establish a National Women's University at Poona.[85] As was discussed in the previous chapter, it was not long after this occasion that Sultan Jahan Begam herself began developing a suitable syllabus for Muslim girls, which included traditional academic subjects, physical education, moral lessons and, at the higher levels, classes in health, hygiene, cooking, feminine arts, child care and social etiquette.[86] It embodied an idea of female education that was, in the terms of Egyptian feminists, "equal plus more."[87] This program was introduced to the Sultania Girls' School in 1922 under the supervision of Miss S.M. Paul, an Indian Christian woman from Rajputana, who had replaced Mrs. Baksh upon her retirement in 1919.

The success of these various reforms was documented by Miss Paul in an address given during Lady Reading's visit to the institution in 1923. She emphasized, in particular, that the new curriculum, with its emphasis on such important subjects as home nursing, hygiene and religious studies was creating a dedicated band of mothers, who were "real earnest religious and God fearing women."[88] Evidently, the aims of reformers from the time of Hali and Deputy Nazir Ahmad were finally being realized. Notably, the school also received the praise of visiting Quaker missionaries to the state, perhaps more impartial witnesses to its development. When Ellen Nainby visited in mid-1924, she commented that over 230 students were well-served by twelve teachers, four sewing mistresses and a matron, several of whom were Indian Christian women. Despite being a purdah institution, it was spacious and airy, containing large classrooms and bed chambers, verandas, a courtyard and

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[84] Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 141.

[85] Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 153-154. For a brief discussion of the National Women's University project, see Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 53.

[86] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Curriculum*, 1-12.

[87] This idea was articulated most clearly by Nabawiyah Musa in her 1920 work, *al-Mar'ah wa al-'Amal* [The Woman and Work]. See Badran, *Feminists*, 148.

[88] "Address by S.M. Paul, Lady Superintendent, Sultania Girls' School, Bhopal" in miscellaneous papers of Miss Fitzroy, 18 Feb., 1923, IOL, Fitzroy Collection, MSS.Eur.E.312/8.

a garden. She also confirmed the judgement of Miss Fitzroy, Lady Reading's personal secretary, given a year earlier, that the girl students were lively and spirited, exhibiting a "humour and intelligence" that she had certainly not seen elsewhere.[89]

In the second half of the Begam's reign, an even more elite institution was opened to provide instruction to girls of the highest classes, particularly those belonging to the ruling family. Called the Sikandaria Girls' School, it was situated within the compound of the Ahmadabad Palace, Sultan Jahan Begam's residence, in an attempt to give confidence to the extremely conservative members of aristocratic Bhopali society, that their daughters would receive appropriate education within a strictly protected purdah environment under the personal supervision of the Nawab Begam. The school served between forty and fifty girls, many of whom stayed as boarders in the palace and some of whom received scholarships, despite their parents' wealth. Its headmistress was Mrs. Margaret Wheeler, an English-born woman, who had previously taught at several government girls' institutions in India, including the girls' high school at Murree. It does not appear to have been a successful endeavour, perhaps due to its absolute reliance on the ruling Begam's presence, and it closed during her extended visit to England in 1925-26.[90] Interestingly, comparable institutions in the Middle East were similarly unsuccessful, but for opposite reasons; Turkish and Egyptian nobles preferred sending their daughters to foreign schools than traditional local institutions.[91]

The educational project that Sultan Jahan Begam became the most consumed with in the latest years of her reign was her most elite endeavour: the tutelage of her three granddaughters, the only children of her youngest son, Hamidullah Khan, and his wife, Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam. From early 1920, she sought to employ an "extraordinarily capable lady," who, while being "thoroughly abreast of the times," could also offer instruction to her beloved granddaughters in moral science, theology, housekeeping, painting, music, English, French, Italian and, preferably, nursing.[92] This cosmopolitan curriculum was closer to that being offered by European governesses to girls of the Westernized upper-classes in Turkey than that pursued in the Begam's own schools.[93] She

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[89] Ellen Nainby Circular, 9 Jul., 1924, FSC/IN/4; and loose papers of the diary of Miss Fitzroy, 18 Feb., 1923, IOL, Fitzroy Collection, MSS.Eur.E.312/8.

[90] There is little information on this institution, but descriptions are found in Begam Humayon Mirza, *Roznamchah*, 32; and the personal communications of Princess Abida Sultaan, 20 Oct., 1995.

[91] Halidé Edib, for example, was sent to the American College for Girls in Constantinople, rather than an indigenous institution. Edib, *Memoirs*, 190-206.

[92] Sultan Jahan Begam to Lady Willingdon, 8 Jan., 1920, NAI(B), BSR No. 1 (B. 59), 1920.

[93] Hanoum, *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions*, 98-100

had, however, began their education herself in the Qur'an and its translation at the appropriate age, and the eldest, Abida Sultaan, had finished, at the age of eight, after a record four years study, in 1921.[94] Following an elaborate *nashra* ceremony to celebrate this achievement,[95] the young princesses' education was begun in earnest, despite the absence of an ideal governess.

As well as instruction in the Qur'an, *hadith*, *fiqr*, Arabic and Persian, which was provided by various *maulvis*, Abida and her sisters also attended classes in English, French, history, geography and mathematics in the English language with two European mistresses, Mrs. Wheeler, mentioned above, and Miss Cohen. Their practical education, provided by employees of the palace, included lessons in horse riding, shooting, various sports and some domestic sciences. This program resembled closely that provided to *ashraf* gentlemen of an earlier generation. The princesses received their education separate from the other girls of their extended family, despite the proximity of Sikandaria School and the sharing of staff, apparently because their grandmother did not want them to imbibe the conservative or less 'civilized' ways of the girls of the old landlord families. The sisters' intense schedule of instruction continued until the death of their uncles in 1924 and their subsequent visit to England.[96]

The latter half of Sultan Jahan Begam's reign was a period when many successes were realized in the field of education and further progress was made. A new generation of educated girls began to emerge from Bhopal, who were able to fulfil many of the new roles expected from Muslim women in the early twentieth century. Not only did they have knowledge of basic academic subjects and traditional female arts, but they were also aware of current scientific methods and the etiquette of modern social gatherings. The Begam had built on customary norms in order to spread unprecedented educational reforms. Her advancement of village-level training schemes, a compulsory education program and schooling for less privileged women represents an extraordinary step forward in this direction. Similarly, her stress on a scholarly English-medium education, accompanied by extensive outdoor

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[94] Abida Sultaan refers to this period of her life, in her unpublished manuscript on the history of Bhopal state, as a time of "torture," as her grandmother, reportedly, cruelly beat her, leaving "dark bruises and hard lumps" on her face and head, in order to 'encourage' her study. See chapter entitled "The Bismillah," 118. I am grateful to Princess Abida Sultaan for allowing me to read this manuscript.

[95] This ceremony is described in a rare document by Khusru Jahan Begam, alias Sardar Dulhan, entitled *An Account of the "Nashra" Ceremony of the Princesses Abida and Sajida Sultan Sahiba of Bhopal*. Bhopal: The "Bombay Chronicle" Press, 1921.

[96] See chapters entitled "Riding" and "Shooting" in Princess Abida Sultaan's unpublished manuscript on the history of Bhopal, 128-137, as well as her personal communications of 29 Oct., 1995.

physical instruction, for her granddaughters exemplifies radical innovation in Muslim female education. Efforts such as these were taken up more ardently by women of the next generation, including the sisters of Maulana Azad.

However, it was the ruling Begam's traditional approach to class and gender hierarchies that continued to have precedence in this era. This is reflected in the consistent championing of domestic roles for women and the vast state expenditure on elite education, particularly for the sons of Bhopali aristocrats and large landowners at the Alexandra High School. Yet Sultan Jahan and her band of dedicated workers, many of whom were graduates of Aligarh College, had managed to bring about a change in public opinion. By the early 1920s, Bhopalis, far ahead of many of their fellow princely subjects in other Muslim states,[97] were finally beginning to show appreciation, rather than indifference, to modern education, especially for women. As the Begam told an American visitor at this time, "In the beginning I had to pay the parents to allow their daughters to attend my schools... now the parents ask to have their daughters admitted and are willing to pay for the privilege."[98] Further developments that occurred in the sphere of female education after the Begam's second trip to England and her abdication from the throne will be discussed in chapter V.

Health Reforms

The early years of Sultan Jahan's reign were dominated, in the field of health, by repeated outbreaks of a particularly severe strain of bubonic plague, which claimed up to fifty lives per day in the state at its height in 1903. The ruling Begam responded swiftly, ordering the establishment of quarantines, the evacuation of infected houses and the introduction of sanitary measures to combat dampness and filth. Though her subjects were sceptical of any precautionary measures, she also sought to institute an extensive vaccination program in the state. These measures were identical to those instituted in Bombay when plague first appeared in the 1890s, though the Begam's methods were less draconian than those of her British overlord. Rather than using force, she encouraged her subjects to participate

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[97] As noted above, the Nizam of Hyderabad had instituted many successful female education projects by this time. Similarly, the Dowager Begam of Janjira, who will be mentioned in more detail in chapter III, had taken great interest in furthering the cause of women's schooling, as well as public health and maternity and child welfare, in her state. The majority of Muslim rulers, however, including the Nawabs of Rampur and Bahawalpur, were much slower to open up opportunities to women. See Syed M.H. Zaidi. *The Muslim Womanhood in Revolution*. Calcutta: Mohammadi Press, 1937, 105-116.

[98] Quoted in Woodsmall, *Moslem Women*, 164-165.

voluntarily in the vaccination program by organizing public lectures to explain the procedure, showing sensitivity to caste and religious sensibilities and providing financial incentives to parents who had their children vaccinated. In order to set a good example for the wider population, she also requested members of the ruling family, state officials and military troops to submit to inoculation first. The Begam's peaceful approach was rewarded when Bhopalis, particularly those who lived in the capital, began to submit willingly to precautionary measures; it was noted in 1907 that there was "probably no city in India" where inoculation had been received "with less prejudice" or by more people. This statement gains validity if one considers the violent upsurge of public resistance to Western medicine that occurred in British India following the adoption of coercive plague measures in 1896-98.[99]

Throughout the plague years, medical assistance was offered to the Begam's subjects by state-employed European and Yunani[100] physicians. Following the lead of Hakim Ajmal Khan of Delhi and Hakim 'Abdul 'Aziz of Lucknow, the Begam began to take an especial interest in this latter system of medicine. Though it had long been identified with Muslim culture, gaining the attention of both her father and her husband, as well as earlier reformers, like Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, it was under serious threat in India by the early twentieth century from practitioners of Western allopathic medicine. Unlike their European counterparts, Yunani physicians, including the many who practised in Bhopal state, had neither made great strides in developing surgical methods, nor assured standards of practice.[101] Encouraged by her chief physician, Hakim Noorul Hasan, Sultan Jahan Begam aimed to revive this cheap and accessible form of medicine in her state by founding a Yunani medical school, called the Asfia School, in Bhopal city soon after her accession to the throne. At this time, a comparable medical institution had not even been founded in Indore state, Bhopal's much

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[99] *Plague in Bhopal*. Bombay: Thacker & Co., Ltd., 1907, 2-11. Measures taken upon the outbreak of plague in Bhopal are also discussed in Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 106-113; and Omar, *Administration Report, 1905-1906*, 19. For comparison with British India, see David Arnold. *Colonizing theBody: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, 200-239; Ian Catanach. "Who are your leaders?: Plague, the Raj and the 'Communities' in Bombay, 1896-1901" in Peter Robb, ed. *Society and Ideology*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, 196-221; and Mark Harrison. *Public health in British India: Anglo-Indian Preventive Medicine 1859-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 140-150.

[100] Yunani Tibb is a form of Greek medicine, founded by Hippocrates, translated into Arabic, and enriched through contact with Ayurvedic specialists, which was initially brought to India by Muslim invaders in the eleventh century. Based in humoural theory, it maintains that the function of the *hakim*, or medical practitioner , is to restore and maintain the balance of certain essential qualities within the body by aiding, but never impeding or superseding, natural healing powers through the prescription of suitable medicines or remedies. See Manfred Ullman. *Islamic Medicine*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997 (reprint), esp. ch. 2.

[101] For a discussion of how indigenous Indian medicine, including Yunani Tibb and Ayurveda, was discredited by the colonial power in the nineteenth century, see Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, 43-58.

larger neighbour, despite the long predilection of state subjects there in favour of treatment by *hakims* and other local doctors.[102] By making a diploma from the Bhopal institution a requirement for state medical employees, the Begam sought to spread knowledge of surgery and increase the level of skill among local practitioners, reconciling the old-style of treatment with modern needs.[103] Such an aim placed her efforts, like those of the Nawab of Rampur and other Muslim princes, firmly in line with Hakim Ajmal Khan's national program of medical reform, as it was disseminated from his school and, later, college in Delhi.[104]

Efforts were also made to cultivate other Yunani facilities in the state. In an attempt to improve the standard of the Yunani medicines that were sold in the Bhopal city bazaar, a state dispensary was established under the direct supervision of the chief physician, selling high quality goods.[105] Over thirty Yunani dispensaries were also maintained by the state, most of which were in the *mofussil*, where they were accessible to the common people of Bhopal. The Yunani system of medicine grew in popularity throughout the reign of the Begam to such a degree that, on average, another dispensary was opened in the state each year. It became so prevalent in the 1920s that as many as seven new dispensaries were opened in 1921, replacing nine allopathic dispensaries which had previously existed. Though the British Agency Surgeon assigned to the state complained bitterly about this change, the Bhopal Political Secretary legitimately defended this decision on the basis that the Yunani system was highly favoured by the state's subjects.[106] This is apparent from the records of attendance at various medical institutions: over twice as many patients visited Yunani dispensaries, as European-style hospitals and dispensaries.[107] Evidently, the Begam had been able to rejuvenate a long-standing medical tradition in her state by consolidating it with modern

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[102] C.E. Luard. *Indore State Gazetteer*. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1908, 173.

[103] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 141-146. The poor standard of Yunani treatment before this initiative is confirmed by a report on the medical facilities of Bhopal state, made by V. Harington, Administration Medical Officer in Central India, in 1904. His response, unlike that of the Begam, was to retire the present "native" physicians and replace them with allopathic doctors. NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 12, 1905.

[104] For more on Hakim Ajmal Khan's program of medical reform, see Barbara D. Metcalf. "Nationalist Muslims in British India: the Case of Hakim Ajmal Khan," *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, 1 (1985), 3-9.

[105] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 147.

[106] C.B. McConaghy, AS, to Abbasi, PS, Bhopal, 24 Oct., 1921, and Abbasi to McConaghy, 25 Oct., 1921, NAI(B), BSR No. 11 (B. 72), 1921 It was also noted in the Administration Report of 1920 that "Most of the people in the district simply refuse to be treated by the allopathic system." In NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 289, 1920. Princess Abida Sultaan recounted that her grandmother, Sultan Jahan, also made exclusive use of Yunani medical facilities. Though she had an allopathic doctor, Dr. Johory, on her personal staff, he had been reportedly hired only for his facility in the English language. Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 29 Oct., 1995.

[107] See, for example, *Administration Report, 1912-1913*, 19. In that year, over 300,000 patients were treated in Yunani dispensaries, as compared to just over 100,000 patients in European style hospitals.

science, just as was being attempted in progressive Muslim communities in Punjab and UP.[108]

It was not until 1909 that Sultan Jahan Begam turned her attention, specifically, to improving health standards for Bhopali women. Aware of the suffering caused in India by women's ignorance of basic medical skills, she sought to introduce nurses' training, like that which was offered in Europe, so as to prepare women to care for the sick, either in their homes or as a profession. A concrete step was taken in this direction when she founded the Lady Minto Nursing School in an annex of the Lady Landsdowne Hospital in honour of the 1909 Viceregal visit to Bhopal. It was placed under the supervision of the hospital's superintendent, at that time, Mrs. F.D. Barnes, M.D. As it was such a new concept, the Begam initially had great difficulty finding students, but she was ultimately able to entice a few young girls to attend through the granting of scholarships.[109] Fifteen years later, the Agency Surgeon reported that the school was still producing nurses that were "trained properly" and appeared to "understand their work well." It is notable that all of the seven named graduates and one of the two instructors were Muslim women, since, at this time, almost no Muslim nurses could be found in British India.[110]

Also in 1909, the Nawab Begam was able to bring to realization her plan of founding a class in Bhopal city for the training of midwives belonging to the hereditary *dai* caste. From 1903, similar classes had been set up throughout India, including in neighbouring Gwalior, under the auspices of the Victoria Memorial Scholarship Fund, an agency co-ordinated with the National Association for Supplying Medical Aid to the Women of India (more commonly known as the Dufferin Fund). But the Begam had not felt confident enough in the skills or commitment of her female medical staff, until the coming of Mrs. Barnes, to commence this project. It was initiated when all the indigenous midwives of Bhopal were called, along with their daughters, to attend classes at the hospital. In order to encourage attendance, they were all provided with a monthly stipend. Once they were properly trained, they were granted a certificate, which enabled them to practice their profession in the state legally.[111] This compulsory instruction and registration process, which intended to prevent unnecessary injuries or even deaths caused by untrained *dais*, was highly innovative, as it had not been fully

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[108] Metcalf, "Nationalist Muslims," 3-9.
[109] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 22-23.
[110] McConaghy to Sultan Jahan Begam, 29 Oct., 1924, NAI(B), BSR No. 53 (B. 100), 1924-25. For comparisons with British India, see Woodsmall, *Moslem Women*, 309.
[111] *Ibid.*, 23-25.

adopted at this time in large states such as Hyderabad or Gwalior, or British India.

Before long, the program was so popular that additional staff had to be hired to assist Mrs. Barnes with the teaching. The annual report of the Dufferin Fund noted that it took only until 1914 before the last and most elderly of the indigenous *dais* of Bhopal city were trained, then examined, like their colleagues, by an officer of the Indian Medical Service. It commented that the scheme had proved to be particularly successful in the state, as compared to efforts in British India, due to the "keen personal interest" of the Begam.[112] This judgement corresponds with the findings of Dagmar Engels in her recent study of Bengal, in which she notes that initiatives by local women to reform the practice of childbirth were far more successful than those promoted by European practitioners.[113] As a result of this success, several European and Anglo-Indian midwives were hired in subsequent years to provide instruction to *dais* in Ashta, Ahmadpore, Raisen, Ichhawar and other regional centres. In 1917, a class was also begun in Sehore by the British Political Agent and the Agency Surgeon to provide instruction to Indian midwives of both the cantonment and the *qasba*.

Though the work of district *dais* was commended by inspectors of the Victoria Memorial Scholarship Fund, they did express their concern that pupils were not receiving sufficient practical training along European lines or enough chances to view European methods.[114] Such criticisms reflect the tendency among British activists to demean the methods of local practitioners, even though they often provided a higher, more personal standard of care to their clients than midwives trained in Western medicine. In British India, this hegemonic approach often forced traditional *dais* out of the profession altogether; Geraldine Forbes has noted that the drop-out rate in required training classes was nearly one hundred percent.[115] Sultan Jahan Begam evidently resisted pressure to conform to this pattern, since, when Dr. Dagmar Curjel visited the state in late 1919, she reported that the largest number of students were still of the *dai* caste, though a percentage were also tribals

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[112] *Thirtieth Annual Report of the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India for the year 1914*. Delhi: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915, 109-110.

[113] Dagmar Engels. *Beyond Purdah? Women in Bengal, 1890-1939*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, 148.

[114] See, for example, *Thirty Third Annual Report of the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India for the year 1917*. Delhi: Superintendent Government Printing, 1918, 74.

[115] Geraldine Forbes. "Managing midwifery in India" in Dagmar Engels and Shula Marks, eds. *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India*. London: British Academic Press, 1994, 171. For similar observations in the context of Punjab, see Anshu Malhotra. *Pativratas & Kupattis: Gender, Caste and Identity in Punjab, 1870s-1920s*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1998, 188-193, 197.

and Muslims.[116] Undoubtedly, the Bhopali classes were more successful with traditional midwives, because they offered instruction in Urdu on a part-time basis, rather than in English in a regular classroom format.[117] Any difference of opinion appears to have been resolved by 1924, however, as the Agency Surgeon, C.B. McConaghy, expressed full satisfaction with both the students and the teachers, Mrs. E. Singh and Siddiqa Bai, after examining the *dais* at Bhopal and Berasia in October of that year.[118]

During her visit, Dr. Curjel also made recommendations for the Maternity Scheme that had been commenced by the ruling Begam a year before. Based on the Willingdon Health Scheme in Bombay, it involved the hiring of four female health visitors, who offered basic medical facilities to poor, purdah-bound women in their homes and supervised the work of midwives. According to Dr. Curjel, these initial recruits were unqualified, but generally competent, even if unorganized.[119] Under the direction of Abru Begam, this program was rapidly expanded such that, by 1922, there were seven health visitors in Bhopal city, who, assisted by the Sub-assistant Surgeon, Bismillah Khanam, and the Superintendent of Lady Landsdowne Hospital, Miss A.E. Paul, inspected the sanitary conditions of zenana houses, gave lectures to women on the principles of sanitation and hygiene, and supervised the care of pregnant women and new-born children. Like health initiatives organized by the Egyptian Feminist Union, these services were offered free of charge in a manner that was in keeping with local norms. Upon realizing that Bhopali women, like their menfolk, were particularly attached to indigenous medicine, for example, health visitors and other female members of staff were encouraged to acquire training in Yunani Tibb, so that they could run the Asfia Female Dispensary and other Yunani health centres for women.[120]

As well as establishing new health facilities, Sultan Jahan Begam also maintained medical institutions that had been founded by her mother, in particular, the Prince of Wales' Hospital and the Lady Landsdowne Hospital for women. This latter institution steadily grew

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[116] *Report of Dr. Dagmar Curjel on Work of Victoria Memorial Scholarship Fund in Bhopal, 31 October, 1919* in NAI(B), BSR No. 24 (B. 82), 1922.

[117] The methods followed in training classes in Bhopal are discussed most comprehensively in A. Lankaster, AS, to 'Abdul Raoof, PS, 16 Feb., 1917; "Qasba Dais"; and *Scheme for the Control of Maternity Nurses, Sehore Cantt.* in NAI(B), BSR No. 2 (B. 34), 1917.

[118] McConaghy to Sultan Jahan Begam, 29 Oct., 1924, NAI(B), BSR No. 53 (B. 100), 1924-25.

[119] *Report of Dr. Dagmar Curjel*, 2-3.

[120] See Abru Begam's introductory article on welfare work for women and children in Bhopal in *Rahbar-i-Sehat*, 1-4. These details are confirmed by the annual administration reports. See, for example, "Administration Report of 1920," 9-10. For more on health initiatives of the Egyptian Feminist Union, see Badran, *Feminists*, 111-112.

in popularity, particularly under the supervision of Miss L. Blong, Superintendent for the first seven years of the Begam's reign. Female patients were increasingly attracted to the hospital after purdah arrangements were improved and a dispensary attached in 1905, though the annual Bhopal administration reports primarily attribute the success of the hospital to Miss Blong's personal popularity, managerial skills and dedication to duty.[121] During her administration, the annual report of the Dufferin Fund noted that the hospital was doing "excellent work," proving itself to be a "boon to women, rich and poor, not only in Bhopal but outside the limits of [Bhopal] State."[122] Undoubtedly, this success was partly due to the lack of facilities in neighbouring states; though both Indore and Gwalior accommodated female patients in their chief hospitals, neither offered medical facilities exclusively for women.[123]

In later years, under subsequent lady superintendents, Lady Landsdowne Hospital retained its reputation, consistently serving over five thousand patients annually, although numbers did drop after the opening of the Yunani female dispensary. In the pre-war years, an infant home, named after Lady Hardinge, was attached to the institution, as well as the facilities mentioned above, making it one of the most up-to-date medical facilities for women of its time. It remained one of only 183 zenana hospitals in the whole of India in 1927,[124] but standards had begun to slip in the 1920s. When Lady Reading and Miss Fitzroy visited Lady Landsdowne Hospital in 1922, having already toured similar facilities in numerous other states, they noted in their private correspondence that the hospital was "rotten," being "old-fashioned" and "none too clean."[125] Other princely rulers, notably the Maharaja of Mysore, had begun to surpass the Begam's efforts towards the end of her reign by founding a myriad of modern medical institutions for women in their states.[126]

Nevertheless, visitors to Bhopal in the late 1920s, including Sir Harcourt Butler and Ruth Frances Woodsmall, hailed the Begam of Bhopal for her pioneering efforts to reform women's health facilities, noting that she had promoted programs for female and child welfare

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[121] *Administration Report, 1907-1908*, 21.
[122] "Annual Report of the Dufferin Fund, 1905," cited in Zafar Omar, *Administration Report, 1905-1906*, 19.
[123] *Imperial Gazetteer of India: Central India*, 74
[124] Woodsmall, *Moslem Women*, 304.
[125] Lady Reading to family in England, 22 Feb., 1923, IOL, Lady Reading Collection, MSS.Eur.E.316/3/#8; and Loose papers of the diary of Miss Fitzroy, 19 Feb., 1923, IOL, Fitzroy Collection, MSS.Eur.E.318/8.
[126] For more on Mysore, see *Forty Fifth Annual Report of the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India for the year 1929*. Delhi: Superintendent Government Printing, 1930, 68.

long before other reformist rulers.[127] As in the field of education, Sultan Jahan Begam had been successful in modernizing old practices and introducing women to new spheres of activity by building on customary norms. Attention was directed to expanding traditional Yunani medical facilities and improving purdah arrangements in hospitals and dispensaries in order to make health care, particularly that which improved the conditions of childbearing, accessible to women. By building, in this way, on an indigenous base, the Begam and her staff were able to guarantee that their efforts, unlike initiatives in British India, were greeted with favour by both practitioners and patients.[128] The focus on separate female health programs also effectively opened up health professions to Muslim women, especially poor girls and orphans, who trained as nurses and midwives. This significant foray by women into the public sphere, which would not necessarily have been agreed to in principle by the ruling Begam, thus became acceptable on the basis of fulfilling the "needs of the female sex."[129]

The Princess of Wales Ladies' Club, Bhopal: Local Activities

In her autobiography, Sultan Jahan Begam expressed her belief that the minds of women could be developed, not only by education, but also by "social intercourse," "good company" and "pleasant surroundings." This idea had long been understood in Europe, where societies and clubs for ladies had been an enduring feature, bringing women of that continent both amusement and benefit.[130] In recent times, it had also been accepted by elite women in Egypt, including Princess Nazli Fazil and Princess 'Ayn al-Hayat, who had first established informal salons to discuss 'the woman's question,' then patronized early women's social organizations such as the Mabarrat Muhammad 'Ali.[131] The Begam realized that Indian women, who lived within even more severely limited frontiers than their co-religionists in the Middle East, had few such opportunities. What they needed was a localized institution, which could bring "light and new ideas" into their minds and "new interests" into their lives.[132] In

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[127] Woodsmall, *Moslem Women*, 305; Diary of Sir Harcourt Butler while on tour with Indian States' Commission, Bhopal, 26 Mar., 1928, in IOL, Butler Collection, MSS.Eur.F.116/108.

[128] For a more thorough discussion of Bhopali women's interaction with the imperial discourse on health, see chapter IV.

[129] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 26.

[130] For the development of these organizations, see Dominique Godineau. "Daughters of Liberty and Revolutionary Citizens" in Geneviève Fraisse and Michelle Perrot, eds. *A History of Women in the West: Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1993, 19-22.

[131] Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 172-176.

[132] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 26.

response, she decided to found a social club for women in Bhopal in 1909, naming it after the Princess of Wales, whom she had recently met at Indore. It intended not only to provide a "delightful change" for ladies after the "hard duties of the household," but also to offer opportunities to partake in "all sorts of intellectual, moral and national movements."[133] As there was no other club in India exclusively for *purdahnashin* at this time, the Begam hoped that her idea would be emulated throughout the country. In fact, it was not taken up in other areas, including Hyderabad state, until several years later.[134]

Realizing that such an unprecedented endeavour would face a good deal of prejudice, Sultan Jahan decided to limit the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club to a highly elite clientele, consisting first of the purdah ladies of her own family, then female relatives of the Bhopal gentry and officers of the state, and certain European and Indian Christian women. The Begam's niece, Aftab Begam, who had been educated under her personal supervision, was initially appointed to the demanding post of Secretary, while Sultan Jahan herself took the title of Patroness. The Club was set up in 'Ali Manzil, a hall and garden attached to one of Shah Jahan Begam's palaces, which was surrounded by a high wall. The hall was equipped with comfortable furniture and modern conveniences, including electric fans, making it a fitting spot for meetings, while the garden was lush and secluded, providing the space for games and amusements. The area also contained a small library, tennis and badminton courts and wooden stalls for exhibitions and fancy bazaars.[135] The highly elite nature of the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club, as reflected in its membership and setting, gives it a somewhat 'cosy' feel that may lead one to dismiss it as mere frivolous entertainment for the privileged classes, rather than a meaningful move towards women's political activism. Such a judgement would not, however, do justice to a historical context in which it was a brave and significant act for Muslim women to meet in any capacity for the purpose of learning, philanthropy or feminist activism.

The Princess of Wales Ladies' Club was formally opened by Lady Minto, wife of the Viceroy, during her visit to Bhopal in November, 1909. Held in the lavishly decorated hall,

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[133] "Decennial Report" in *Decennial Report*, 1-2.

[134] A Hyderabad Ladies' Association had been founded as early as 1901 by a group of European and local women, including Muslims, for the purpose of both philanthropy and amusement. It was not until 1913, however, that a club, called the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam, was established that operated strictly within the dictates of Islam. Zaidi, *Muslim Womanhood*, 107. According to Begam Shah Nawaz, a society for Muslim women had also been started in Lahore in 1907, but it had an extremely small member base, being limited to women of the Mian family. *Father and Daughter*, 16.

[135] "Decennial Report" in *Decennial Report*, 1-2.

this ceremony involved several elaborate rituals, including the opening of the Club with a "golden key," as well as a congratulatory speech by Lady Minto. This speech was translated into Urdu by Atiya Faizi, a highly educated and active Muslim woman from Bombay, who, along with her sister, Zohra, became a regular visitor to the state from this time.[136] Despite this grand beginning, the Club progressed slowly in its first three years of operation, regularly attracting only about twenty of the one hundred and twenty-one Club members on the roles, regardless of the initiatives of Aftab Begam and her successor, Abru Begam. Of those who did attend, few had fulfilled the ruling Begam's expectations that they would scale down expensive domestic rituals so as to have extra funds to help poor and needy students. Fewer still had initiated hands-on projects to spread knowledge to women outside the Club, including illiterate women, poor girls and aged widows. As a result, both Sultan Jahan Begam and her eldest daughter-in-law, Shaharyar Dulhan, gave speeches at the club's third anniversary gathering, emphasizing the need for Bhopali women to cultivate the Club by promoting social intercourse, abolishing extravagant customs, sympathizing with their fellow creatures and acquiring useful skills to help the poor.[137] These charitable aims were shared with women's organizations across the Muslim world, although societies in the Middle East, including the Mabarrat Muhammad 'Ali and the Jam'iyyat al-Shafaqa bi'l-Atfal in Egypt, had made significantly more progress by this point, targeting the needs of poor women by opening clinics and orphanages, distributing food and financing weddings.[138]

In her role as the new chairwoman, Shaharyar Dulhan suggested that one method by which members could easily assist in the regeneration of "all mankind" was by giving "useful" speeches at the Club based on information found in newspapers and journals hailing from the more progressive Muslim heartland, including the *Pioneer*, *Oudh Akbar* and *Tahzib un-Niswan*.[139] In fact, it had been specified from the beginning that lectures should be given by members of the Club on "subjects of feminine interest," just as was being done in existing women's rights groups in Egypt such as the Jami'iyyat Tarqiyat al-Mar'a.[140] Sultan Jahan

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[136] Lady Minto's speech is quoted in full in Sultan Jahan Begam. *Account*, vol. III, 46. Lady Minto notes in her own journal that she made the speech up on the spot, as she brought the wrong address to the gathering! Mary, Countess of Minto, *India, Minto and Morley*, 348.

[137] "English translation of a speech delivered by Shahryar Dulhan Begam in the Ladies' Club, Bhopal" and "Some brief remarks [by Sultan Jahan Begam] on the report submitted by the Secretary of the Ladies' Club, Bhopal" in *Decennial Report*, 20-26, 121-125.

[138] Marsot, "Revolutionary Gentlewoman," 261-275.

[139] "Speech delivered by Shaharyar Dulhan Begam at the Ladies' Club" in *Decennial Report*, 24.

[140] Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 176-177.

Begam inaugurated the practice and gave as many as fifty-two lectures in the first decade of the club's existence on topics ranging from morality and patriotism to housekeeping and hygiene.[141] Her most successful series of lectures was on religious injunctions in Islam. Presented to the Club in 1917, it was soon after gathered in the collection, *Sabil ul-Jinan*, and sent to libraries all over India.[142] She also encouraged other members of the Club to develop their own essay-writing and speech-giving skills by setting topics each week and offering a prize for the best piece of writing. Her youngest daughter-in-law, Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam, was most active in this field, giving several lectures on hygiene, charity and other topics.[143] The Begam's other daughters-in-law, Shaharyar Dulhan and Qaisar Dulhan, also spoke occasionally in the early years of the Club, along with other women of the ruling family and employees of the state, including Mrs. Baksh and Mrs. Barnes. This ritual of public speaking, followed by publication, became a central feature of new women's societies across the Muslim world, not only strengthening the social and intellectual bonds of the women involved, but also linking oral and written traditions within the new literary culture.[144]

In the pre-war years, members of the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club also began to take part in philanthropic activities. At first, they built on the tradition of creating *waqfs* to finance social services by making and collecting financial donations to a variety of causes, some of which were of a political nature. These included the Muslim University Fund, the Indian Relief Fund, the Red Crescent Society and the St. John's Ambulance Corps.[145] In the crisis situation brought about by the First World War, they went a step further, following the example of upper-class British women, both in India and Britain, as well as elite Turkish women, like Halidé Edib, who had initiated more practical relief work under the auspices of the Taali-Niswan club during the Balkan wars.[146] Under the direction of Shah Bano Begam, Bhopali women not only collected clothes and blankets, but also made khaki *kurtas* for the

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[141] Many of these were discussed in the previous chapter. They are gathered in various collections, including: *Decennial Report*; Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*; and Abru Begam, *Rahbar-i-Akhlaq*. They compare favourably with early collections published in Egypt such as Malak Hifni Nasif's *Nisa'iyat* [Feminist Pieces, 1909].

[142] See Sultan Jahan Begam, *Sabil ul-Jinan*.

[143] Some of Shah Bano Begam's speeches, which were published in *Decennial Report*, are also discussed in the previous chapter.

[144] Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 181.

[145] See "English translation of a speech delivered by Her Highness in a meeting held to raise subscriptions forthe Indian Relief Fund" and "English translation of a speech delivered by Her Highness at a meeting held in connection with the Muslim University in the Ladies' Club, Bhopal" in *Decennial Report*, 112-115, 150-154.

[146] Edib, *Memoirs*, 334-335.

Red Cross Society.[147] However, it was not until after the war that practical charitable activities by women other than the ruling Begam became a prominent feature of the Ladies' Club in Bhopal. Involving elite women as active overseers, rather than just patrons, these projects corresponded with the contemporaneous development of the Jam'iyyat al-Mar'a al-Jadida (or Société de la Femme Nouvelle) by Muslim women in Egypt, like Princess Nazli Halim and Huda Sha'rawi.[148]

At the suggestion of the Begam's son, Colonel Obaidullah Khan, a branch of the St. John's Ambulance Association had been opened in Bhopal in 1911-12, offering classes in first aid at schools, hospitals and dispensaries throughout the state. It seems that, as early as 1914, these classes were extended to the women of the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club. However, little is actually known about them until they were formalized early in 1919 in what Sultan Jahan Begam referred to as the School for Mothers. Seemingly inspired by Lady Chelmsford's Maternity and Child Welfare movement, this training centre was founded by the ruling Begam as part of the Ladies' Club, so that child-bearing mothers could be adequately prepared for their "responsible vocation" of bringing up healthy children, who would ultimately become "useful citizens of the State." Like schools of 'feminine culture' in Egypt, it aimed to professionalize the tasks that women already performed by transforming them into a taught-program of home economics, which included childcare and training, cookery, sewing, needlework, elementary hygiene, home nursing and housekeeping. According to the Begam's detailed description of the project, instruction was to consist of lectures, imparted in Urdu, by female health officers of the state and voluntary workers, particularly English women, under the supervision of a lady doctor, as well as home visits. These were deemed necessary so that teaching could be adapted to individual needs and its application "rationally enforced." Women's traditional obligations were also to be recognized through the provision of covered conveyances and childcare.[149]

Sultan Jahan Begam introduced the scheme in these terms to Bhopali women at a grand meeting of the Club, attended by members and recent graduates of the Victoria and

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[147] This work was resumed in 1919 during the Afghan war. Maimuna Sultan to Revd. James Black, HS, Red Cross Society, 2 Jun., 1919, NAI(B), BSR No. 37 (B. 55), 1919.

[148] Marsot, "Revolutionary Gentlewoman," 270-272.

[149] "School for Mothers," attached to letter from Sultan Jahan Begam to Lady Reading, 6 Oct., 1921, NAI(B), BSR No. 5 (B. 72), 1921. For comparisons in the Egyptian context, see Badran, *Feminists*, 147.

Sultania Girls' Schools, to celebrate her accession to the throne in January, 1919.[150] Shortly after, classes in First Aid, Hygiene and Home Nursing were actually begun for eleven Muslim women, all of whom were wives of the Bhopal gentry or high officers of the state.[151] Based on the syllabus specified by the Indian Council of the St. John's Ambulance Association,[152] these classes were primarily taught by Miss A.E. Paul, Superintendent of the Lady Landsdowne Hospital, and Bismillah Khanam, Superintendent of the Asfia Yunani Dispensary, although instruction was also given by several health visitors, including Mrs. Phillips and Mehrunnisa Sahiba, and the Assistant Superintendent of the Zenana Poor House, Sayeedunnisa Sahiba. Examinations were held every six months by members of the Indian Medical Service (usually the Agency Surgeon posted to Bhopal). As nearly all of the Club members were in purdah, the male examiner would sit on one side of a curtain and the women on another, while a young boy moved back and forth between the two groups, checking that the right woman was answering the questions and acting as a patient for the students to treat. Successful candidates were rewarded with medals.

Having observed this process, Ruth Frances Woodsmall, a visitor to the state in the 1920s, reported that the women, most of whom were very aristocratic and had been in strict seclusion all their lives, showed utter "delight and joy" in their achievements. As one elderly Begam told her, "Not that we expect to do nursing,... but now we know how to take care of our own families and make better homes."[153] Training provided at the mother's school was consistently portrayed as having this domestic purpose. Yet it is clear that the Begam also intended it to open up professional opportunities to the women of Bhopal, first on a voluntary basis, just as was being done by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain under the auspices of the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam in Calcutta.[154] Soon after the first set of students had graduated from the classes offered, they were prompted by Sultan Jahan Begam to assist health workers

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[150] "English Translation of a speech by Her Highness in the Ladies' Club, Bhopal" in *Decennial Report*, 96-101. Also printed as "On Women's Responsibilities" in *Speeches of India Princes on Politics*. Allahabad: Prince & Press, 1919, 57-62.

[151] The First Aid class included Ashraf Dulhan, Sarwat Dulhan and Mazhar Dulhan, all of whom were wives of jagirdars or nobles, as well as Iftikhar Dulhan, wife of Nawab Nasrullah Khan's secretary, and Mumtaz Begam, wife of the former Naib Kotwal of Bhopal. The Home Nursing class included Sayyid Jahan Begam, Qamruzzaman Begam, Tamkin Dulhan and Sarfaraz Bibi, all of whom were the wives and daughters of nobles. The Home Nursing class included Velayat Bibi, wife of the state treasurer's nephew, and Sairah Bibi, wife of the late superintendent of Farrash Khana. "Decennial Report" in *Decennial Report*, 13-14.

[152] See *Regulations for the Formation of Male or Female Classes in connection with centres: with the syllabus of the various courses of instruction*. Simla: Indian Headquarters of the St. John's Ambulance Association, 1917.

[153] Woodsmall, *Moslem Women*, 306-307.

[154] The activities of the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam in Bengal are discussed in Hossain, *Rokeya*, ch. 4.

of the Maternity Scheme in improving the miserable conditions of less privileged women by giving lectures on sanitation and hygiene in the zenana houses of the city. Although volunteers were first solicited from the ranks of the ruling family, other women were encouraged to take part through the provision of a pecuniary allowance and conveyances. The Begam displayed her interest in this field by generously increasing the salaries of both Abru Begam, secretary of the Club, and Bismillah Khanam, health lecturer, in recognition of their work in this direction.[155] As in the Middle East, charity work of this type signified the emergence of purdah-bound into a sphere of activity, which was previously unthinkable .[156]

Although the School for Mothers was supposed to have six classes- Gestation, Art and Games, and Nursing, as well as the three mentioned above, it is evident from various reports in the early 1920s that students only regularly attended and got satisfactory grades in First Aid. In 1924, for example, the Agency Surgeon, C.B. McConaghy, noted that thirty-one ladies had passed the First Aid examination, while only four or five had completed Home Nursing, Home Hygiene and Sanitation.[157] Despite these reservations, the scheme was clearly successful in resuscitating interest in the institution. When Dr. Dagmar Curjel of the Victoria Memorial Scholarship Fund visited the Club late in 1919, she reported that, since classes had commenced, attendance at the bi-weekly meetings had increased and become more regular. She also noted, like Woodsmall, that the women were "very keen" about what they were learning- in fact, so "eager" that it was "quite difficult" for her to get away.[158] Further developments in the area of women's education at the Club, which occurred after the Begam's abdication, will be discussed in chapter V.

The Princess of Wales Ladies' Club, Bhopal: "Extraordinary" Meetings

Besides these regular gatherings of the local women of Bhopal, which were held for the purpose of lectures, classes or amusement, the Club also hosted many "extraordinary" meetings, some of which were described as being of a "national and political character."[159] These grand meetings, nearly a hundred of which were held in the first eleven years of the club's existence, attracted prominent women from all over India. Bhopali women, for whom

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[155] "Short speech delivered by Her Highness in the Ladies' Club" in *Decennial Report*, 89-92.
[156] It has been noted in the case of Egypt that the need for social services following World War I led "normally intolerant " husbands to approve women's public activities. See Marsot, "Revolutionary Gentlewoman," 269.
[157] McConaghy to Sultan Jahan Begam, 29 Oct., 1924, NAI(B), BSR No. 53 (B. 100), 1924-25.
[158] *Report of Dr. Dagmar Curjel*, in NAI(B), BSR No. 24 (B. 82), 1922.
[159] "Decennial Report" in *Decennial Report*, 4.

it was exceptional even to meet women outside their family, must have been tremendously affected by this broadening of their social sphere to include women, not only from the big, modern cities of India, but also from abroad. Although personal accounts are not available to confirm this point, comparisons can be drawn with elite women in Egypt who underwent a similar process of socialization. Huda Sha'rawi, for example, notes in her memoirs that the expansion of her limited circle of friends and relations to include Turkish and French women, as well as other Egyptian women, influenced her life substantially by introducing her to new intellectual and feminist ideas.[160]

The most eminent guests to the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club were the Vicereines, who, like Lady Minto, were brought to the Club, during tours of the state, to meet the elite of Bhopali female society, give addresses and play games. It appears that Lady Hardinge, who visited in December, 1912, made the greatest impression on the members by discussing her initiatives for Indian women, including the women's medical college at Delhi, and soliciting donations for her fund to assist Turkish widows and orphans.[161] The wives of other high British officials, including Lady Meston, Lady O'Dwyer and Mrs. Daly, as well as the wives of Bhopal's Political Agents, were also welcomed at the Club. This frequent social intermingling of Europeans and Indians, a somewhat unusual occurrence at the time, was perceived by women of the Club as being beneficial to both parties. Indian women were said to have "profited" from the educational and social advancement of their "European sisters," while the latter were "greatly affected" by the morals and culture of the former.[162]

Distinguished Indian women also attended meetings at the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club in Bhopal, which were held for ostensibly charitable reasons such as collecting subscriptions for the Muslim University Fund or to promote female industries. Gathering of this sort, which involved women as diverse as the Begam of Janjira, the Begam of Korwai, Suhrawardy Begam of Calcutta, Nafis Dulhan of Aligarh and Mrs. Maqbul Husain of Lucknow, were highly significant in the process of forging links between Muslim women of different families and areas, and building an all-India Muslim identity. Other meetings, including those held in January, 1919, when the Begam announced her School for Mothers

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[160] Huda Sha'rawi. *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist.* Tr., ed. and intro. by Margot Badran. London: Virago Press, 1986, 82.

[161] Both Sultan Jahan Begam and Shah Bano Begam eulogized her visit in speeches at the Club after her death. See *Decennial Report*, 67-69, 110-111.

[162] "Decennial Report" in *Decennial Report*, 9-10.

scheme, and December, 1920, on the club's anniversary, had the equally important effect of drawing together women of "all communities and classes." Though the Ladies' Club had essentially remained an elite Muslim organization since its establishment, it was opened on these occasions to all Muslim, Hindu, Parsi and Christian women of the state, including teachers and students of the girls' schools and members of the Davis Ladies' Club in Sehore, as well as numerous Indian and European visitors such as Cornelia Sorabji and the Maharani of Dewas. The second event drew together as many as eleven hundred women of varied backgrounds for lectures, medal presentations and even a cinema show.[163] In doing this, the Club resembled later, more explicitly feminist organizations such as the Egyptian Feminist Union and the All-India Women's Conference, which held similar events in order to lessen the distance between women of different classes and creeds.[164]

This trend was continued at the gala celebrations, held over two weeks in November, 1921, in honour of Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam's twentieth accession anniversary. The program consisted of numerous activities for both women and their children, including an essay-writing contest, a children's show, a sports' tournament and a series of health lectures, all of which were reportedly attended in "huge numbers beyond expectation" by "ladies of all classes."[165] Though most of the women at the gathering were from Bhopal, the special guest was Munawwar Jahan Begam, new wife of the Nawab of Junagarh and niece of the Begam of Bhopal, who attended the function accompanied by all of her companions from Junagarh. Though the majority of participants were most likely Muslim women, it is evident from both the program and the ensuing report that women of other faiths were also encouraged to attend. On the first day, for example, a dictation competition was held, in which the best entry, with regard to "correctness and good handwriting," was to get a prize. Medals were subsequently awarded to three Muslim ladies for Urdu dictation and two Hindu ladies for Hindi dictation. Similarly, at the essay-writing competition, medals were given to several Muslim and Hindu women. The preeminent figure, however, was Zohra Faizi, the elder sister of Atiya Faizi, who won a prize for her writings on each of the three topics.[166]

Zohra Faizi's success in this contest is not surprising if one considers that she was a

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[163] "Decennial Report" in *Decennial Report*, 10, 165-166.

[164] Badran, *Feminists*, 100-101; and Aparna Basu and Bharati Ray. *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference 1927-1990*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1990, 96.

[165] "Decennial Report" in *Decennial Report*, 169-172.

[166] *Ibid.*, 169-170. Other women who won prizes were Salma Bi, Alia Khatun, Raunaq Zeman Begam, Kudnan Bai, Waheed Bano Saheba and Sarla Devi.

regular contributor to women's journals, including *Khatun* and *'Ismat*, as well as the author of several books, notably, *Tandrushti Hizar Naimat* [Health is Wealth].[167] Nevertheless, it is significant in that it reflects the elite bias that infused the reformist milieu of the time. This prejudice is equally evident in the descriptions of other special activities held at the meeting. Topics of the essay-writing contest focussed on the uplift of women, but assumed that they were both in purdah and in "comfortable" circumstances.[168] Similarly, the speeches given by female health workers of the state appeared to show an interest in the health of rich and poor women, but, in fact, revealed a lack of both understanding and concern with women unlike themselves. In Bismillah Khanam's lecture on childbirth in "both rich and poor" homes, for example, she addressed the "funny" habits of village women for the "pleasure" of her audience, describing, with glee, how they bore their children while working in the forests or the field, cut the umbilical cord with a sharp stone, washed their newborn baby with leaves, then walked home with it under their arm. Echoing the sentiments of *memsahib* reformers, she dismissed the validity of this method of childbirth, claiming that village children neither underwent proper mental development, nor were able to resist disease. She then turned her full attention to rich purdah women of the cities.[169] Mehrunnisa, a Yunani health visitor, similarly rejected the idea of providing medicinal treatments to the poor, after pronouncing that their illnesses, unlike those of the rich, were due to a faulty way of living and a lack of culture.[170]

Evidently, economic inequalities were not adequately addressed by the elite women who organized the meeting. Gender differences, on the other hand, were given a high profile. Realizing the difficulties for women of gaining access to modern medicine, health lecturers focussed on practical and accessible methods of health care. While many of the speakers emerged from the Yunani tradition, a system of medicine which is inherently functional, others simply chose to lecture on "cheap and easy" precautions, which could be followed at home. Similarly, there was a stress on the relevant. Speeches were given on topics which were

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[167] Ali, *Emergence*, 62, 204.

[168] Program of the Club meeting on Sultan Jahan Begam's twentieth accession anniversary, in *Decennial Report*, 167-168.

[169] Bismillah Khanam. 'Precautions to be observed in homes, both rich and poor, before and after childbirth' in Abru Begam, *Rahbar-i-Sehat*, 51-52. For comparable opinions in the writings of *memsahib* reformers, see Forbes, "Managing Midwifery," 153-154.

[170] Mehrunnisa. 'What kinds of principles should be followed for the protection of health in poor Hindustani homes?' in Abru Begam, *Rahbar-i-Sehat*, 61.

central to the lives of Indian women, including hygiene, malaria, childbearing and childcare.[171] This focus on women's traditional role as mother enabled the highly atypical professional women, who gave the speeches, to gain the trust of the women in their audience (and their husbands), so that they could introduce improved health care into the zenana. In order to gain the same approval for women's participation in literary culture, women's domestic roles were also emphasized in the topics framed for the essay contest. Competitors were asked to write on how women could take care of their families on a limited income, what industries could be conducted by women in their homes and what the best job was for women within the home.[172]

Although this cult of domesticity was a feature of women's reform movements across India, Sultan Jahan Begam placed it in this forum, as in her theoretical writings, within the hierarchical framework of Islam. In her final speech of the meeting, young female activists were encouraged to demand their legal rights, but only if they recognized man's economic and political superiority.[173] The Begam herself had always remained within the limits set by Islam, even while advocating educational reform and the spread of modern medicine. In promoting the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club, she was also sensitive to tradition, focussing activities on domestic roles, maintaining strict purdah and involving children, who were bound to accompany their mothers, in women's events. Her conventional approach enabled her to gain the trust of more conservative members of the Muslim community, so that she could involve formerly purdah-bound women in initiatives outside the home. The focus on Islam did, however, circumscribe efforts to promote social interaction between elite Muslim women and women of other classes and communities. The health lectures of Bismillah Khanam and Mehrunnisa and the final speech of Sultan Jahan highlight the inability of women reformers of this era, bound by an earthly hierarchy, to address women of a different economic base or religious background. While the health workers could offer no medical advice to poor women, the ruling Begam could speak only in terms of Islamic doctrine before a religiously-mixed audience.

Yet the Begam's reformist initiatives in Bhopal did lead Muslim women of the next

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[171] See speeches given by the preeminent female health workers of the state, Miss A.E. Paul, Superintendent of Lady Landsdowne Hospital and Bismillah Khan, Sub-assistant Surgeon of the Asfia Yunani dispensary, as well as several Health Visitors (both Allopathic and Yunani), including Mrs. Phillips, Mrs. Mary Bai, Mehrunnisa, Mrs. Bashirullah Khan and Mahmooda Begam, in *ibid.*, 7-97.

[172] Program in *Decennial Report*, 167-168.

[173] 'Speech by Her Highness on Polygamy and Equality of Sexual Rights' in *Decennial Report*, 172-188.

generation in the direction of making more radical demands. The founding of the Ladies' Club, in particular, was an unprecedented step forward, as it purposefully drew women out of their homes and into social, intellectual, national and political movements. Bhopali women, who previously had little contact outside their family circle, were encouraged to exchange ideas, first, with other Muslim women of the state, then with women of other communities and classes, and, eventually, with visitors from all over India and beyond. The innovative institution was admired by visiting Muslim women, including Begam Humayon Mirza of Hyderabad, who toured the Club premises in 1918, having come to Bhopal for the All-India Ladies' Conference. She noted in her diary how much she liked this institution, expressing her wish that they had a similar club in Hyderabad, where women could get the benefits of mutual discussion.[174] Very shortly after, she founded the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Dakkan in her own state, an institution which took courageous steps towards securing women's economic freedom, legal and social rights and Hindu-Muslim unity.[175]

Conclusions

In a speech given at the Sultania Girls' School, during Lady Reading's visit in 1922, Miss S.M. Paul, the Superintendent, eulogized the contribution of Bhopal's ruler, Sultan Jahan Begam, to the development of Muslim women. She spoke of her "broad minded principles," her "self denying sacrifice" and her "zealous ardour for work," reminding the audience of the unprecedented efforts that had been made in the state, during her reign, not only in the sphere of education, but also in the realm of health programs and social institutions.[176] A myriad of girls' schools and training institutions had been founded, health care had spread into the countryside and the darkest recesses of the zenana, women were actively discussing reformist topics and seeking to limit 'useless' customs. The ideal woman presented in reformist literary tracts of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was coming to life. But she had taken a step further than had been envisioned by male reformers. The 'new' women from Bhopal had left both the psychological and physical world of strict purdah, though they still wore the veil, after having attended schools, lived in boarding houses and

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[174] Begam Humayon Mirza, *Roznamchah*, 29.

[175] Zaidi, *Muslim Womanhood*, 107-108. Many of the Anjuman's members also became active in the political movements leading up to Indian independence.

[176] "Address by S.M. Paul, Lady Superintendent, Sultania Girls' School, Bhopal," in the miscellaneous papers of Miss Fitzroy, in IOL, Fitzroy Collection, MSS.Eur.E.312/11a.

socialized with women from all over India. They had been introduced to modern medicine, professional training, outdoor sports and political issues. And now they were moving into the public domain, gaining employment, working for the poor and organizing meetings, in a way that Sayyid Ahmad would undoubtedly have found repugnant.

This emergence had been achieved primarily because Sultan Jahan Begam, like reformers before her, had built on existing traditions in order to introduce change. She appeased orthodox sections of Bhopali society by maintaining strict purdah restrictions in all women's facilities in the state, including schools, hospitals and the Club, and fostering an ideology, which stressed women's domestic roles and the primacy of religion. Of course, her status as the ruler of the state was also extremely important. Not only did she have the authority to change public opinion, but she also had the resources to make sure that her institutions rarely floundered. Through the provision of state-funded stipends and scholarships, she was able to attract students and teachers to her schools, patients and health workers to her hospitals and members to her Club, overcoming attendance and staff problems that were experienced elsewhere. Similarly, she was able to freely make grants for closed conveyances, boarding houses and libraries, as well as other requirements, which were essential to making girls' schools and other women's institutions survive.

Yet Sultan Jahan Begam's dependence on an Islamic model of reform, with its acceptance of innate inequality, meant that her initiatives for the uplift of less-privileged Bhopalis were bounded. Though she supported schools for poor girls and accessible health care, her 'pet' projects were elite educational and social facilities such as the Sultania Girls' School and the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club. The excessive state expenditure on the Alexandra High School, above village level training schemes or even girls' schools, further reflects the Begam's firm association with the *ashraf* class of Muslims, as well as her commitment to a graded society, in which both women and the poor would remain members of a subordinate class. She confirmed this inclination in her speech at the grand meeting of the Ladies' Club in 1921, when she informed her audience that the superiority of one being over another was "manifest in all the affairs of the world." Equality could never be established between the rich and the poor, or the two sexes: God intended the poor to labour for the rich in the fields or the factories, and women to serve men in the home. This was, she maintained,

the "very law of Nature."[177]

Having considered this professed ideology, it is evident that many of the results of the Begam of Bhopal's reformist initiatives were unforseen. Schools and clubs, which were intended to produce better wives, mothers and Muslims, fostered interest in a much wider range of subjects than expected, including those of a political nature. Students and members also built networks of friendship and communication, which, in time, led to the formation of social service organizations by and for purdah-observing women. The insistence on the maintenance of purdah in all medical and educational facilities, seemingly a regressive step, also effectively opened up professions to women. By sensitively introducing modernist reforms in this way, the Begam also successfully liberalized public opinion to a degree that her subjects were more willing to accept new ideas in the future. Activists of the next generation and the 'new' women of Bhopal, including the sisters of Maulana Azad and Shah Bano Begam, were able to build on these foundations laid by the ruling Begam, in order to initiate still more progressive projects. Their influence accounts, in a large part, for the resuscitation of the Asfia Technical School and the broadening of the Ladies' Club in the early 1920s. It will be seen in the subsequent two chapters how this, in turn, led to feminist activism at the national level, first in the style of social reform, then in a more explicitly political manner.

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[177] 'Speech by Her Highness on Polygamy and Equality of Sexual Rights' in *Decennial Report*, 183.

III: Social Reform at the National Level

Introduction

The creation of new female institutions in public space in the early years of the twentieth century, including schools, clubs and health projects, had the effect of building an India-wide network of educated Muslim women, who were eager to initiate more explicitly feminist activism on the national stage. More often than not, this activism first arose in the context of the women's reform movement, rather than as nationalist militancy, as it did in Iran.[1] The women of Bhopal were a part of this process, establishing close connections with other reformers throughout India through their participation in all-India movements of social reform that emanated from Muslim centres in the United Provinces, Punjab and Bengal, as well as other princely states. Bhopal's female ruler, Sultan Jahan Begam, was at the forefront of many of these activities. As well as patronizing various institutions at the reformist centre of Aligarh, including the Aligarh Girls' School, the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College and the Muhammadan Educational Conference, she also played a vital role in the establishment and development of early Indian women's organizations. These included the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam (or All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference), the All-India Ladies' Association, the National Council of Women in India (NCWI) and the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC). In all of these endeavours, the Begam was assisted, as she was in her own state, by a devoted band of followers, which included the women of her own family, the sisters of Maulana Azad and the Faizi sisters of Bombay.

As Geraldine Forbes has pointed out, descriptions of the Indian women's movement have focused on the suddenness of women's entry into national political life. Observers have noted that in the short time between 1917, when Sarojini Naidu led the first women's franchise delegation to Lord Montagu, and 1947, when India gained independence, women were able to expand greatly their sphere of activity to include involvement in public movements and interaction with unrelated males. They were able to affect this change through their involvement in one of the three all-India women's social service organizations: the AIWC, the NCWI or the Women's Indian Association (WIA).[2] Such depictions, though primarily made within a Hindu context, contribute to a 'purdah to politics' idea of Indian

[1] For a discussion of Iranian women's national political emergence, see Paidar, *Women and the Political Processes in Twentieth-Century Iran*, ch. 2-3.
[2] Forbes, "From Purdah to Politics," 219.

women's political emergence, which is also relevant to the portrayal of women in the Muslim community.[3] Such an analysis, however, does not do justice to the complex factors which contributed to the growing visibility of Muslim women on the national stage.

As has been argued in previous chapters, Muslim women's political emergence was a gradual process which involved building on existing traditions in order to introduce limited change. By maintaining purdah norms and emphasizing women's traditional roles, the Begam of Bhopal was able to introduce girls' schools, female medical programs and zenana clubs to her state, which brought women in contact with the world outside their homes. It is the intention of this chapter to investigate how she initiated further steps forward in the movement for women's rights by building on this foundation. The changing style of involvement by Bhopali women in national women's organizations and Muslim reform movements, as well as their interaction with the next generation of female reformers, will be charted in order to discern both the new ideals and the constraints which emerged in the Muslim women's movement in the early years of the twentieth century.

The Reformist Activities of Indian Muslims

By the late nineteenth century, Indian Muslims were beginning to realize that preference was being given by the British rulers to those candidates for government service who had received a modern education in English. Yet the expectation remained in traditional families that young *sharif* Muslims would receive a thorough grounding in Islamic theology. Hoping to accommodate these conflicting demands, early Muslim reformers, most notably, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, sought to establish a British-style educational institution, which would also provide religious training. Organizations such as the Committee for the Better Diffusion and Advancement of Learning Among Muhammadans of India were founded to promote the project, gather public opinion and collect funding, with the hope that idea could eventually be brought to fruition. In doing so, a constituency was mobilized, which supported, not only the school, but also the ideology behind it. By the time the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College was founded at Aligarh in 1875, it was not just a school, but a symbol of a wider movement.[4]

Sayyid Ahmad Khan aimed to extend the influence of the Aligarh movement to

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[3] This is exemplified by the title of Begam Ikramullah's autobiography, *From Purdah to Parliament.*

[4] For the background behind the MAO College's establishment, see Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, ch. 2-3

Muslims throughout India by establishing the Muhammadan Educational Conference (MEC) in 1886. The intention of this organization was to co-ordinate the existing regional efforts for educational reform, including the Anjuman-i-Islamia (founded 1869) and the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam (founded 1884) in Punjab and the Anjuman-i-Islam (founded 1876) in Bombay, inclining them towards the Aligarh method.[5] In order to make English education more legitimate in the eyes of the Muslim community, resolutions were passed in favour of more religious education in government primary schools and scholarships offered for higher education in English.[6] From the early 1890s, the Conference also sought to promote education for Muslim girls. At the instigation of Sayyid Karamat Husain, a law professor at Aligarh, who later opened a Muslim girls' school in Lucknow, a separate women's section was created in 1896 to address this problem directly. Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali, author of the radical treatise on women's rights, *Huquq un-Niswan*, and founder of the pioneering Urdu journal for women, *Tahzib un-Niswan*,(see chapter I) was the section's first secretary. The founding members passed well-intentioned resolutions regarding the need to educate the community's future mothers, but no concrete action was taken until Shaikh 'Abdullah, a young Aligarh lawyer, became secretary of the women's education section in December, 1902. Encouraged by his wife, Wahid Jahan Begam, he began collecting funds to start a female normal school for Muslim girls, which would uphold Islamic values.[7] This initiative was comparable to that launched in 1901 by the Jam'iyya Ta'lim al-Banat al-Islamiyya, a male organization for female education in Egypt.[8]

Within the Hindu community, male reformers had established organizations to improve the status of women at a much earlier date. Members of the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal had come together as early as the mid-nineteenth century to combat child marriage, polygamy and sati, as well as prohibitions on female education and widow remarriage. They soon realized, however, that women themselves were fundamental in perpetuating traditional values. Evidently, they would need to be included in the process of changing the attitudes of the community. As a result, the Brahmobandhu Sabha was started in 1863 to provide zenana education to Bengali women. Subsequently, associations such as the Brahmika Samaj were

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[5] For a discussion of these regional anjumans, see Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 175-187.

[6] For the early activities of the MEC, see Abdul Rashid Khan. *The Contribution of the All-India Muslim Educational Conference to the Education and Cultural Development of Indian Muslims, 1886-1947*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1991.

[7] Minault, "Shaikh Abdullah," 214-216.

[8] For a brief discussion of this organization, see Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 134.

created with the purpose of encouraging women to bring about their own advancement, as well as that of their kinswomen. Similar efforts were fostered in western India by Justice M.G. Ranade, who established the Arya Mahila Samaj in 1882. By the end of the century, Hindu male reformers from all over India were prompting their women to start new associations for female uplift. Though these male-guided organizations provided valuable experience to women who had never before been involved in public work, they also restricted women's activities to the concerns of male reformers.[9]

In general, Muslim women were not personally involved in movements for social reform until the early twentieth century, far behind Hindu women. There were, however, certain exceptions. Nawab Sikandar Begam of Bhopal expressed her support for the views of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, long before he had been accepted as a leader by the Muslim community. Undoubtedly, the Nawab Begam, as one of the few Indian princes who had remained loyal to the British during the Indian Mutiny, was in agreement with his belief, as spelled out in *The Loyal Muhammadans of India*, that the only means to justice and stability in India was through the acceptance of British rule. They also appear to have concurred on the need to introduce modern education to the Muslim community. As was detailed above, Sikandar had founded unprecedented institutions in her state to spread education to both the male and female populations, as well as providing her granddaughter, Sultan Jahan Begam, with training in modern subjects, including English.(see chapter II) Sikandar also demonstrated her sympathy with Sayyid Ahmad's program of reform openly by presenting him with an expensive jewelled ring in 1866, just two years before her death. He donated the ring to the Scientific Society of Aligarh to fund educational activities.[10]

Sikandar Begam's daughter and successor, Shah Jahan Begam, was not so supportive of the Aligarh enterprise. Unlike the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Nawab of Rampur, she was not among the major donors to the MAO College, nor did she encourage a significant number of state subjects to attend the institution.[11] Rather, she patronized the reformist activities of her second husband, Siddiq Hasan Khan, a leading member of the Ahl-i-Hadith sect. As was described in chapter I, the Begam provided him with the essential assistance to publish over 180 reformist texts in Urdu, Arabic and Persian, which were circulated throughout India and

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[9] Forbes, "From Purdah to Politics," 221-222; and *Women in Modern India*, 65-68.
[10] J.H. Prinsep's Address to the Scientific Society, 2 July, 1866, printed in Yusuf Husain, ed. *Selected Documents from the Aligarh Archives*. New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1967, 76.
[11] Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 139, 184.

the Middle East. This act resulted in severe retribution from the British government when these works were identified as being an articulation of *jihad*.(see chapter IV) The reformist emphasis of Bhopal's female rulers once again shifted back to the modernist proposals of the Aligarh movement with the succession of Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam in 1901. As will be seen in the remainder of the chapter, she placed herself at the forefront of all-India movements for social reform, pioneering the more widespread involvement of elite Muslim women in national organizations in the early twentieth century.

Early Contact with the Aligarh Movement

Shortly before the meeting of the MEC in Lucknow in 1904, Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam was approached by Shaikh 'Abdullah regarding the establishment of a girls' school at Aligarh.[12] She records in her autobiography that, when he visited her in Bhopal at this time, they had a long discussion on all aspects of female education, after which she promptly sanctioned a monthly grant for his endeavour. Having recently established the Sultania Girls' School in her own state, she was eager to patronize similar efforts elsewhere.[13] She also enabled the Shaikh to give effect to a resolution which had been passed at the Educational Conference the previous year in favour of organizing a ladies' industrial exhibition in connection with the Female Education Section. Examples of needlework were provided by the pupils of the Victoria Girls' School for a small display of women's crafts at the Conference in Lucknow.[14] With the Begam's evident financial and ideological backing, the Shaikh was able to convince sceptical Conference members that the scheme of founding a girls' school was viable. A resolution was passed in favour of the plan.

Over the next year, Shaikh 'Abdullah continued to travel around India to gather funds and public support for the girls' school. Prominent amongst those who offered assistance were Zohra and Atiya Faizi of Bombay, who had recently completed their education in England. Along with his wife, Wahid Jahan Begam, they helped him to organize a comprehensive exhibition of women's crafts and a meeting of Muslim women in conjunction with the 1905 session of the Female Section of the Educational Conference in Aligarh. The

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[12] Shaikh 'Abdullah appears to have been on a fund-raising tour with the Duty Society, to which the Begam also gave a generous donation. S.K. Bhatnagar. *History of the MAO College Aligarh*. New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1969, 155-156.

[13] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 254.

[14] It was reported that this small exhibition was greeted with a "fair amount of success." "The Proposed Mahomedan Ladies' Conference" in *The Indian Social Reformer* (Bombay), 15 (16 Jul., 1905), 554.

exhibition, which consisted of fine samples of needlework, painting and calligraphy, included embroidery by the girl students of Bhopal and a painting by the Begam herself. For the most part, the impressive display was greeted with admiration by the Conference members, who had previously given little or no attention to the arts of their hidden womenfolk.[15] Evidently, they realized that more consideration needed to be given to female education.

The first all-India meeting of Muslim women, on the other hand, was not greeted with the same favour. For many months beforehand, the merit of convening such a gathering was debated in the Indian press. While many women felt that a formal ladies' conference was required to spread the benefits of progress and culture to women, others believed that a national organization would be limited in its effectiveness by women's lack of education, poor social status and purdah restrictions. What would be more beneficial, the latter argued, was small local associations. This claim was rejected by several eminent Muslim women, including Khujista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardy, an educationalist from Bengal,[16] and Begam Mushtaq Hussain, wife of Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk of Aligarh, who asserted that "enlightened" women would be able to surmount the above-mentioned difficulties to organize a national meeting just as easily as a local one. They proposed making a step in this direction by holding a "small informal gathering" for women who visited Aligarh for the MEC and women's exhibition. Though Shaikh 'Abdullah felt the proposal was premature, he agreed to arrange accommodation so that the ladies could hold a meeting if they wished.[17]

Disapproval expressed by other members of the Educational Conference meant that provisions for a room on the Aligarh campus had to be changed at the last minute. Evidently, they felt that the reputation of Aligarh College and the Conference could be damaged by connections with a women's meeting. Nevertheless, the gathering went ahead. Zohra Faizi, having travelled from Bombay, presided over the meeting, which was attended by about forty women. Though it was small, it was a historic gathering for Muslim women, as they had never before joined with women from all over India to discuss the amelioration of their sex. As well as passing resolutions in favour of the girls' school and praising the activities of

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[15] *The Aligarh Monthly* went so far as to describe the exhibition as "one of the most interesting features of the Conference." *The Aligarh Monthly* (Aligarh), 4 (Feb., 1906), 1-2.

[16] Khujista Akhtar Begam, of the politically influential Suhrawardy family of Calcutta, founded two of the earliest primary schools for Muslim girls in Bengal, as well as translating several novels from Urdu into English. In recognition of her accomplishments, she was granted an honorary degree in Persian from Calcutta University. See Ikramullah, *Purdah to Parliament*, 14-15.

[17] This summary of the debate and its press coverage is based on "The Proposed Mahomedan Ladies' Conference," *The Indian Social Reformer* (Bombay), 15 (16 Jul., 1905), 554.

Shaikh and Begam 'Abdullah, speeches were also given defending the meeting on the basis of Islamic beliefs. Begam 'Abdullah pointed out that the Prophet had commanded women to become educated and help one another, which was exactly what they were doing.[18] By promoting their activities on the basis of religious injunctions, the women were able to counter the opposition of orthodox men in their community. They were evidently not yet ready to push their cause too far, however. Without the support of even enlightened men, like Shaikh 'Abdullah, or preeminent women, like the Begam of Bhopal, the effort petered out. No attempt was again made to establish a national Muslim women's organization until 1914, when the political climate was more favourable.(see below) This outcome is not surprising, considering that, in 1905, formal women's groups in the Middle East were still limited to small learning societies such as the Jam'iyyat Bakurat Suriyya [Society of the Dawn of Syria] and the Zahrat Misr [Flower of Egypt], which made no attempt to articulate a program of women's emancipation.[19]

Sultan Jahan Begam herself did not visit Aligarh until July, 1910, when her youngest son, Nawabzada Hamidullah Khan, was enrolled at the College. As well as being given a tour of the campus, the Begam also paid her first visit to the Aligarh Girls' School, which continued to exist largely as a result of her bounty.[20] By 1909, the attendance had increased from the initial seventeen girls to around a hundred students. As a result, the Abdullahs' had recently moved the school, as well as their own residence, into a larger building in Aligarh town. Despite close supervision, parents continued to be concerned about purdah arrangements, particularly when their daughters passed the age of puberty. Shaikh 'Abdullah and his followers decided that the solution was to open a boarding house, as had been done in girls' schools in Turkey, which would not only ensure that very strict purdah could be observed at the school, but would also allow girls from other areas in India to attend. When consulted by the Shaikh, the Begam of Bhopal enthusiastically endorsed the plan by providing a generous grant for the residence hall to be built, which was matched by a government grant-in-aid. The Begam had hoped to lay the foundation stone herself for the new Muslim Girls' School Hostel when she visited in 1910, but she was only able to inspect the plans before she

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[18] *Khatun* (Aligarh), 3 (Jan., 1906), 3-12, cited in Minault, "Shaikh Abdullah," 219-220.

[19] Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 176.

[20] The Begam provided a initial grant of Rs. 5000, as well as a recurring monthly grant of Rs. 100. The Nawabs of Tonk and Bahawalpur and the Mir of Khairpur gave monthly grants of Rs. 50 each. *Khatun* (Aligarh), 6 (Sept., 1909), 327, cited in Minault, "Shaikh Abdullah," 222n.27.

was called back to Bhopal.[21]

While at Aligarh, the Begam did have time, however, to meet with Begam Mushtaq Hussain and other wives of Aligarh luminaries with whom she was to become more familiar in the years to come. Though it is impossible to know of their conversations, it seems likely that they were in agreement on matters of women's reform, since they had each spoken out in favour of female education and women's gatherings within a traditional framework. Later in the year, Sultan Jahan Begam again had the opportunity of meeting leading Indian women, some of whom emerged as eminent reformers, in a social setting when she attended a purdah party in Simla, hosted by Lady Dane, the wife of Punjab's Lieutenant-Governor. At this gathering, she appears to have had her first contact, not only with the wives of prominent Indian politicians, including Lady Harnam Singh and Mrs. Sinha, but also women from other princely states such as Maler Kotla and Loharu.[22] This experience must have been comparable to that undergone by Huda Sha'rawi, when she attended the first women's salon in Cairo in the late 1890s at the encouragement of Eugénie Le Brun, a Frenchwoman, who was married to the future Egyptian prime minister; she remarked that this occasion "nourished my mind and spirit."[23] It was not long before both Sha'rawi and the Begam were meeting some of the same women within the political forum of national women's organizations.

Early Involvement in All-India Conferences on Social Reform

As was seen in chapter II, the Begam of Bhopal had moved to found a women's association in her state as early as 1909 in which women could define their own interests and plan their own activities. The Princess of Wales Ladies' Club provided a first opportunity for the women of Bhopal to meet with women outside their homes and gain experience in political organization. Inspired and guided by Muslim women, it was undoubtedly unique, though similar efforts were being initiated by women of other communities in other areas of India. All of these associations, however, were limited by their regional focus. On the other hand, the existing all-India organizations for women's reform, including the Female Section of the

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[21] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 96. For the background to this incident, see Minault, "Shaikh Abdullah," 224-225. For a commentary on girls' boarding houses in Turkey, see Edib, *Memoirs*, 190.

[22] *Ibid.*, 105. The women of Maler Kotla, in particular, became renowned in the field of women's social reform. The daughter of Nawab Sir Zulfiqar 'Ali Khan, Qudsia Begam, later married Sayyid Aizaz Rasul, a *taluqdar* from UP, gave up purdah and became a leading member of the AIWC and the Muslim League. For a summary of her activities, see Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 198-199.

[23] Sha'rawi, *Harem Years*, 78.

Muhammadan Educational Conference and the Bharata Mahila Parishad of the National Social Conference were constrained by a male agenda. It was not until SaralaDeviChaudhurani launched the Bharat Stree Mahamandal in 1910 that a permanent national association for Indian women, founded and controlled by women, was established. Associations with a comparable membership base were not founded in Egypt until 1914, although sectarian women's organizations such as the Jam'iyyat Tarqiyat al-Mar'a and the Mabarrat Muhammad 'Ali had been established several years earlier.[24]

As she had already arranged to visit the Allahabad Industrial Exhibition the same month, Sultan Jahan Begam agreed to be a member of the new society and attend the first meeting, although she declined to be the association's first president on the basis that she already had too many existing duties as the ruler of a state. Her reactions to the Mahamandal were mixed. She admired the speeches of the Begam of Janjira, the president,[25] Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, the secretary, Cornelia Sorabji and several European ladies, but questioned why all the proceedings had to be in English. As many of the Indian women present were unable to understand the addresses, the Begam found herself giving an impromptu summary of each speech in Urdu. She lamented in her autobiography, "I regard speeches in English as altogether out of place on occasions of this description. Their only effect is to weary the audience and reduce the attendance at subsequent meetings."[26] Disagreements over the language issue effectively highlighted important differences between the approach of Sultan Jahan Begam and Sarala Devi. The Begam sought to develop a more indigenous organization, which would take into account local culture and traditions. Though she agreed with Sarala Devi on the importance of women's autonomy, she felt that more regard needed to be shown for women's traditional roles and customary observances such as purdah.

The divergence of opinion between the Begam of Bhopal and Sarala Devi became all the more apparent the following year, when the Begam presided over the Female Section of the Muhammadan Educational Conference in Aligarh. Following her own presidential speech on the difficulties facing female education, an annual report was presented by Shaikh 'Abdullah and speeches given by prominent Hindu women leaders. The Begam was very

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[24] Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 176-180.

[25] The Begam of Janjira, or Nazli Begam, was the third sister of Atiya and Zohra Faizi of Bombay. Belonging to the extended Tyabji clan, she was married to Sidi Ahmad Khan, the Nawab of Janjira, in an attempt to raise the status of the Faizi branch of the family through connections with old Muslim nobility. Theodore P. Wright. "Muslim Kinship and Modernization: The Tyabji Clan of Bombay" in Ahmad, *Family, Kinship and Marriage*, 227.

[26] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 114-115, 117.

impressed with the address of Sarojini Naidu, whom she felt spoke with "much earnestness and good sense." Mrs. Naidu, like the Begam, specified in all of her speeches on women's reform that women had been assigned specific duties as wives and mothers, which needed to be cultivated through education so that they could assist in the regeneration of the nation.[27] Sultan Jahan was not, on the other hand, appreciative of Sarala Devi's speech, which she felt included far too many references to national politics than was appropriate for a woman speaking at a non-political gathering like the Educational Conference.[28] Despite her own position as the ruler of an independent state, the Begam of Bhopal disapproved of the participation of 'ordinary' women in politics, arguing that such 'manly' activities could interfere with their domestic duties.(see chapter I) Unmindful of the Begam's censure, Sarala Devi continued to promote the Bharat Stree Mahamandal. In years to come, branches of the association founded girls' schools, widows' shelters and industrial training centres throughout India. Sarala Devi herself became a prominent political figure within the Indian National Congress, making bold statements on women's rights which were far ahead of her time.[29]

In subsequent years, Sultan Jahan Begam fostered connections with regional women's organizations and local girls' schools that had appeared in various Indian cities, including Allahabad, Lahore, Hyderabad, Gwalior, Calcutta and Lucknow, in the hope of raising women's social status and promoting female education across India. As well as offering essential financial backing, she also visited certain clubs and schools personally to offer guidance and support. Her visit to the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam in Lahore in March, 1913 is typical of this development. At a ceremony to lay the foundation stone for the Sultania Muhammadan Ladies' Hall, she admired the work completed by women of the club, particularly in the field of religious education, before urging them to extend aid to poorer women of the district by opening up opportunities in nursing, midwifery and teaching. Having emphasized the need for philanthropy, she gave her permission for the new meeting hall to be named after her. She contended that this act symbolized the unity and cooperation between the women of Bhopal and Punjab from which the whole Muslim nation would benefit.[30]

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[27] See, for example, "Education of Indian Women," Sarojini Naidu's lecture at the 1906 Indian Social Conference in Calcutta, printed in Grover and Arora, *Sarojini Naidu*, 158.

[28] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 160.

[29] For the activities of Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and the Bharat Stree Mahamandal, see Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 70-72, 94, 142-143.

[30] Speech by Sultan Jahan Begam to the Khawatin-i-Islam in Lahore, 10 Mar., 1913, in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 95-100. For information on her patronage of other local purdah clubs and schools, including Rokeya's Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School in Calcutta and Sayyid Karamat Husain's Muslim Girls' School in Lucknow, see speeches

Connections were being made between Muslim women across India which would be reinforced through involvement in the soon to be established all-India women's organizations.

All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference

The inaugural ceremony of the recently completed Aligarh Girls' School Hostel in March, 1914 provided the opportunity for Muslim women of different regions to formalize the casual relations that had been made over the last decade, organizing a second, greatly expanded, all-India meeting on the pattern of that held after the women's craft exhibition in 1905. By this time, the attitude of the Muslim community towards women's involvement in public movements had changed dramatically; as will seen in chapter IV, Muslim women had been summoned into the political arena in the intervening years by Muslim leaders, like Maulana 'Abdul Bari and the 'Ali brothers, who sought to utilize women's moral authority to bolster their religious and educational movements. The time was ripe for women to take another small step forward in the process of their political emergence by establishing an autonomous organization, devoted to women's issues, but firmly within the bounds of tradition: the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference.

In recognition of her generous financial assistance, the Begam of Bhopal was asked by Shaikh 'Abdullah to preside over the inauguration of both the new hostel and the women's conference, an extended ceremony which was attended by around three hundred Muslim women from all over India, as well as a few European guests and the teachers and students of the Aligarh Girls' School. Most of these guests belonged to an elite group of educated women, who were able to pursue reformist projects as a result of their relationship with prominent Muslim politicians. They included the Begam of Janjira, wife of the princely ruler, Abru Begam and Fatima Begam, sisters of Maulana Azad, Begam Shafi and her sister, Begam Shah Din, wives of leading Muslim Leaguers, as well as many others. Their *sharif* status demanded that purdah arrangements be extremely strict, even though certain women among them, notably, the Faizi sisters, were in the process of reducing restrictions on their movement. Not only was the walled hostel closed to men, but the women were only permitted to move around the city in closed conveyances. These arrangements were organized by Shaikh 'Abdullah, who evidently believed that it would be safest for the

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and reports in *Account*, vol. III, 233; *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 143-146; and NAI(B), BSR No. 23 (B. 71), 1921.

reputation of the College and the Conference if customary restrictions were maintained.

While in Aligarh, Sultan Jahan Begam was also able to complete various other functions, including meeting with local reformers, laying the foundation stone of the new headquarters of the MEC and attending receptions on the College campus. Ideas put forward in all of these forums highlight the importance being attached by early female activists to education, rather than women's legal rights or philanthropy, as was being done in the Middle East.[31] Education was considered the first step to ameliorating the poor status of Muslim women in India. This point was argued persuasively by Sultan Jahan Begam in her presidential speech before the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference when she claimed that female education was necessary if Muslim women were to know the rights- and duties- which had been granted to them under Islamic law.[32] Resolutions passed by the women delegates confirmed this emphasis. Two of the three primary aims of the Conference involved promoting religious and secular education for women. In order to achieve these objectives, it was decided to provide scholarships to girls of different regions so that they could attend the Aligarh Girls' School and fund local educational projects in cities throughout India. A resolution was also passed stating that Muslim girls should not be married before the age of sixteen years, as such marriages impinged on a girls' education.[33]

The above aims reflect the incremental approach to female education taken by the founders of the Conference. By upholding customary norms, they hoped to overcome the apprehensions of conservative Muslims about female uplift and introduce gradual change. These considerations led the Begam of Bhopal, in her first speech to the gathering, to advocate that emphasis be placed on moral and religious education and domestic training when preparing a suitable syllabus for girls' schools. Similarly, she urged the establishment of specific Muslim girls' schools and boarding houses, in which strict purdah was maintained. By strict purdah, she meant the type of stringent restrictions which were customary in North India.[34] This interpretation was confirmed by Begam 'Abdullah, when she assured the gathering that, as there was only one guarded door in and out of the compound of the new

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[31] The earliest women's organizations in Egypt, for example, were the Jam'iyyat al-Shafaqa bi'l-Aftal (1908) and the Mabarrat Muhammad 'Ali (1909). Both were founded for the purpose of philanthropy. See Baron, *Women's Emergence*, 172.

[32] Presidential speech at the Muslim Ladies' Conference, in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 128-134. It was also printed in *Risala-i-Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam* (Lahore), 30 (Mar.-Apr., 1914), 18-24.

[33] Resolutions of the Ladies' Conference, in 'Abdullah, *Riport*, 31-32.

[34] Sultan Jahan Begam's response to the Committee of the Girls' School, in 'Abdullah, *Riport*, 26.

boarding house, there was no chance that any man could enter, nor girl leave.[35] The women evidently believed that the number of girl students would not increase, until the Muslim community felt their traditions were being observed. Even then, they were likely to withdraw their daughters from school once they reached the age of eleven or twelve. For this reason, Sultan Jahan Begam argued that the majority of resources should be put into primary and middle schools.[36]

Women leaders realized that, just as the fears of orthodox Muslims needed to be recognized, so did the aspirations of modernist reformers. As a result, Sultan Jahan Begam championed many modernist policies, including English education for Muslim girls, in her speech at the opening of the hostel. English education, she submitted, was needed as much by girls, as boys, since they were the first teachers of children.[37] Her inclusion of this topic is particularly interesting, since, in other forums, she almost always argued in favour of a strictly vernacular education for girls. Even in her own curriculum for girls' schools, published a couple of years later, English was only introduced at the higher grades as a secondary subject.(see chapter I) Such comparisons confirm that her message was somewhat tailored to the Aligarh audience, which was supportive of English education. This is not to deny that the Begam was very much in agreement with many of the basic principles which underpinned the Aligarh enterprise. In fact, her comment upon arriving at the College for the above events reflects her identification with Sayyid Ahmad Khan's intentions: "I feel like breathing the Cambridge air when I come to Aligarh."[38]

The educational agenda elucidated by the first Muslim Ladies' Conference was not particularly radical, having already been accepted by the Female Section of the Muhammadan Educational Conference nearly two decades before. However, it was unusual for it to be elucidated by Muslim women themselves. This autonomy was a defining feature of the Conference, which emerged in various speeches and resolutions. Even before the women had officially gathered, Sultan Jahan Begam had, in a conversation with Nawab Muhammad Ishaq Khan, the honorary secretary of Aligarh College, expressed her belief that men were not doing

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[35] Address by Begam 'Abdullah, in 'Abdullah, *Riport*, 17.

[36] Sultan Jahan Begam's response to the Committee of the Aligarh Girls' School, in 'Abdullah, *Riport*, 28.

[37] *Ibid.*, 24-25.

[38] Quoted in Bhatnagar, *History of the MAO College*, 319. According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *sharif* Muslim males needed, not only a grounding in their own religion and culture, but also a thorough knowledge of European knowledge and manners, so that they could gain a respected position in the British Indian administration. So that they may receive such an education, the Indian Muslim College was to be based on the principle of English public schools and universities, like Cambridge. Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 103.

enough to spread female education, warning him that, if men did not give equal attention to both male and female education, then they would face the wrath of God.[39] Though not explicitly stated, the tone of her comments suggest that she was increasingly wary of relying on men to bring about female emancipation. Rejecting the patronizing attitudes of many male reformers, she evidently sought to give women more responsibility for their own destiny by directly involving them in educational projects. The establishment of an autonomous Muslim Ladies' Conference was part of this advancement.

A more candid appeal for women to take up the cause of female education themselves was made in Sultan Jahan Begam's two speeches at the inaugural ceremony of the hostel and the Conference. Though she acknowledged the invaluable work that had been achieved by earlier reformers like Shaikh 'Abdullah, she insisted, like her contemporaries in the Middle East, that female education could not really advance under the direction of men, since they did not really understand the importance that needed to be attached to it, nor the issues involved. She urged her female listeners to take practical steps to spread education, particularly on the subject of health, by founding schools in their families and neighbourhoods, and taking an active role in social reform organizations.[40] These sentiments were incorporated into the Conference aims in the form of several resolutions, which urged Muslim women to convene the Ladies' Conference once a year, open branches of the organization in their own towns and cities and personally contribute to women's journalism in order to create unity and fellowship among Indian women.[41] This fostering of independent action by women was a radical step forward, which distinguished the work of pioneering Muslim female reformers, like Sultan Jahan Begam, from their male predecessors.

It is evident from private conversations in and around the Conference that the new female leaders intended to introduce unprecedented reforms to the Muslim women's reform movement, although they did not yet articulate them in a public forum. When Shaikh 'Abdullah, Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan and Maulana Nizamuddin Hassan went to call on

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[39] Quoted in 'Abdullah, *Riport*, 4.

[40] Presidential Speech in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 128-134; and Response given to the Committee of the Aligarh Girls' School, in 'Abdullah, *Riport*, 20-29. This latter speech was also printed in various women's magazines, including *Zil us-Sultan* (Bhopal), 1 (Feb., 1914), 28-46; and *Khatun* (Aligarh), 9 (Feb.-Mar., 1914), 44-54. An anonymous woman of the same era wrote very similar sentiments in *al-Jins al-Latif*, an Egyptian women's journal: "Don't wait, gentlewomen, for what men will bestow upon you, for the wait will be long." See Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 181.

[41] Resolutions of the Ladies' Conference, in 'Abdullah, *Riport*, 31-32.

the Begam shortly after her arrival in Aligarh, the conversation immediately turned to interpretations of Quranic passages on the rights of women. What, the Begam asked her visitors, were their views on the appropriate degree of purdah observance? Passages in the Qur'an, which spoke of women lowering their gaze, suggested that a woman should be able to leave the house, if she wore a veil to cover her face. Maulana Nizamuddin agreed, explaining that the veil was necessary to stop the weaker sex from being teased. The group concluded that the restrictions on women's movement in India were unnecessary customary observances, which were not required by the *shari'at*. Purdah, as it was practiced in Egypt and Turkey, was sufficient.[42] Although these arguments were considered too radical for the inaugural session of the Muslim Ladies' Conference, they did emerge at subsequent national women's meetings.

While in Aligarh, the founding members of the Conference also elected several executive officers and a working committee to further the reformist program set about above. As well as confirming the Begam of Bhopal's status as president, the Conference also selected Waheeda Begam Yaqub, of Lahore, as vice-president, and Nafis Dulhan Sherwani and Begam 'Abdullah, both of Aligarh, as joint-secretary and honorary secretary, respectively. The working committee was made up almost exclusively of female relatives of the influential group of Aligarh trustees, who controlled the College and the MEC.[43] A few members were also selected from outside Aligarh, including Zohra Faizi, of Bombay, and Iqtidar Dulhan, of Bhopal. The membership on these committees serves to demonstrate the extremely elitist nature of the Conference. Like concurrent efforts in the Middle East such as the Taali-Niswan in Turkey and the Jam'iyyat al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya in Egypt, it was limited by both socio-economic and geographic constraints, which prevented it from reaching women of the lower classes or other regions.[44] In this way, it was very much like its 'brother' organization, the All-India Muslim League, which similarly represented a faction of predominantly UP Muslims, despite its avowedly national affiliation.[45]

Just as the Conference was trying to get itself organized, the First World War broke out in Europe, overwhelming, at least for a time, other political considerations. Like other

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[42] This conversation is recounted in *ibid.*, 2. For comparable debates in writing, see chapter I.

[43] It included Mahmud Begam, Begam Aftab Ahmad Khan, Begam Khwaja 'Abdul Majid, Begam Muhammad Ishaq Khan and Begam Haji Musa.

[44] For comparisons in the Middle Eastern context, see Edib, *Memoirs*, 334; and Badran, *Feminists*, 55.

[45] Gail Minault has made a more sustained comparison of the Muslim Ladies' Conference and the Muslim League in "Sisterhood or Separatism?," 83-108.

Muslim organizations, the Conference promptly issued a statement to the Government of India, expressing its "unswerving" loyalty to the British crown. Sultan Jahan Begam, as the association's president, offered the assistance of the "Muslim ladies of India" in any capacity which they may be useful, assuring the Viceroy that, at the very least, they would all be praying for a British victory.[46] Her statement reveals that the urban, educated, elite women, who were the sole members of the Conference, believed that they represented all the Muslim women of India. Assumptions such as this, though well-meaning, effectively eclipsed the problems, particularly those of an economic nature, faced by other groups of women.

The Conference continued to meet annually during the war years, but attendance dropped off significantly. Sultan Jahan Begam herself, the founding president, ceased to attend any further meetings, though she continued to support the association with a generous stipend, which was used to provide a grant to the Aligarh Girls' School and a few other institutions. Her contributions to the movement for female education continued to be eulogized by Conference members, who attempted to collect donations for a boarding house to be built in her memory.[47] Despite the Begam's absence, some of her collaborators from Bhopal, most notably, Abru Begam, became increasingly involved with the Conference. She appears to have been a devout presence at the gatherings, quoting retributory passages from the Qur'an in Arabic to encourage members to abandon sinful modern behaviour and promote religious education above all other aims.[48] Disregarding her conservatism, other members of the Conference became more open in their promotion of purdah as it was ordained in the *shari'at*, rather than Indian custom. Having passed resolutions in favour of lessening purdah restrictions, many of the women began wearing the new Turkish-style *burqa*, consisting of a coat with a detachable veil, which allowed them to move about more easily in public, while still being modestly covered.[49]

The only really significant activity by the Conference, after its seemingly momentous

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[46] Sultan Jahan Begam to W.S. Davis, PA, 30 Oct., 1914, NAI(ND), GOI, F&P, Oct., 1916, Nos. 13-34.

[47] See Resolution 9 at the 1915 conference in Aligarh, moved by Begam 'Abdullah to "acknowledge the kindness" of the Begam of Bhopal. Nafis Dulhan, ed. *Riport muta'alliq ijlas-i-duwam All India Muslim Ladies' Conference ba-maqam 'Aligarh mun'aqidah-i-duwum o chahum April 1915*. Aligarh: Institute Press, 1915, 49-50.

[48] See, for example, Speech by Abru Begam Sahiba, in Nafis Dulhan, *Riport*, 45-48. Abru Begam also fulfilled the role of a 'religious conscience' in Bhopal, organizing and leading various religious ceremonies for women. She seems to have been led into these activities by her Arab upbringing and comprehensive religious training. Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 29 Oct., 1995.

[49] For a summary of the meetings in Aligarh (1915), Meerut (1916) and Delhi (1917), see Minault, "Sisterhood or Separatism?," 92-93.

establishment, occurred at the Lahore meeting in 1918. It was organized by an active group of Punjabi women, led by the sisters, Begam Shafi and Begam Shah Din, and their daughters, Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz and Asghari Muhammad Rafi.[50] A remarkable five hundred women attended from all over India, wearing, at the request of the local committee, only plain clothes, rather than heavy silks or gold jewellery, so as to demonstrate their solidarity and dedication to service. In order to simplify purdah arrangements and encourage discussion, all the women were accommodated at the conference site. The grand gathering was presided over by Abru Begam, who gave an inspiring presidential speech to start the conference off on a fitting note. As well as the usual resolutions on education, Begam Shah Nawaz proposed that the Conference take a strong stand against the evils of polygamy. Her controversial resolution stated that, as polygamy was against the true spirit of Islam and contrary to the progress of the Muslim community, educated Muslim women should do all they could to bring an end to the practice. It was passed with much enthusiasm.[51]

Unlike similar passages in Sayyid Amir 'Ali's *Spirit of Islam* and Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali's *Huquq un-Niswan*, the resolution was greeted with outrage in the Muslim press. Though *Tahzib un-Niswan*, the leading Muslim women's journal, was in favour, many other Urdu journals for women viciously attacked it. Rashid ul-Khairi, editor of *'Ismat*, was the most virulent, claiming that the women of the Conference had only passed such an anti-Islamic resolution in order to impress their western, Christian mentors. Such comments echoed those that had earlier been levelled at the radical reformist tracts of female intellectuals, like Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Maticur*, published in 1905.[52] As with Rokeya, these criticisms touched a nerve with the women activists, who publicly insisted that their resolution had emerged from their own tradition. Although the Qur'an permitted polygamy in certain cases, it also stipulated that a man had to treat all of his wives equally- an impossible task. As a result, the spirit of Islam, if not the letter, enjoined monogamy. Though Rashid ul-Khairi had actually made this same argument in several of his novels, including *Saukan ka Jalapa* [The Sorrow of the Rival Wife], he was unwilling to concede that women, who were supposed to be modest and unassertive, could stand up for their own rights in a public forum.[53]

Surprisingly, Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal was in agreement with this patronizing

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[50] For the education and activism of these four women, see Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter*.
[51] Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter*, 49-50.
[52] Hossain, *Rokeya*, 238-239.
[53] Minault, "*'Ismat*," 135-136. Also see chapter 1.

male reformer, even though she had consistently maintained that women needed to take responsibility for their own self reform. In a speech before a grand meeting of the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club in 1921, the Begam addressed the "enthusiastic" speeches given at the 1918 meeting of the Conference in Lahore, arguing that polygamy was a necessary institution that had been ordained by the Holy Qur'an. Though polygamy could be an "intolerable affair," Muslim women should know better than to "exceed the limits of Allah." She admitted that women did have a right to complain should they be badly treated by their husbands. But to make such an "unseemly noise," passing "impracticable resolutions" in open meetings and conferences was, in her opinion, "rather bold, and exceeding all bounds."[54] Though her stance seems contradictory when considering her earlier initiatives, it is actually consistent with her policy of acquiescing to orthodox opinion on controversial issues. She believed that such concessions were necessary if she was to introduce her other more important reforms, like female education.(see chapter II)

The anti-polygamy resolution confirmed the end of any active involvement which the Begam of Bhopal might have had with the organization which she had founded. Links between Aligarh and Bhopal were, however, sustained in other ways. In recognition of her long service to the movement, Sultan Jahan Begam was appointed the first chancellor of the new Aligarh Muslim University in 1921, a position from which she launched an important committee of enquiry into the working of the institution in the late 1920s.[55] The Begam and her son, Hamidullah Khan, also continued to patronize various projects, including a mosque, a hostel and a science college, as well as the Aligarh Girls' School. After a visit from Shaikh 'Abdullah early in 1923, the Begam once again freed this institution, then a high school, from terminal financial difficulty by raising her grant. She also wrote personally to the Muslim rulers of Hyderabad, Jaora, Palanpur, Junagadh and Korwai, requesting them to materially assist the Girls' School so as to put it back "on its legs again."[56] Before long, the Aligarh Girls' School was not only out of financial difficulty, but also expanding to the status of an

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[54] 'Speech by Her Highness on Polygamy and Equality of Sexual Rights in a Grand Meeting of the Ladies' Club, 26 November, 1921' in *Decennial Report*, 172-178.

[55] "Memorandum by Her Highness the Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University" in IOL, Hartog Collection, MSS.Eur.E.221/32.

[56] These letters indicate the unrivalled influence which the Begam held in the field of female education; nearly all of the rulers raised their annual grants. See letters between Sultan Jahan Begam and HH Zubdatul-Mulk Diwan Mahakhan of Palanpur, HH Nawab Sahib Mahabat Khan Rasul Khan of Junagadh, HEH. Asafjah Muzaffarul-Mamalik of Hyderabad, Nawab Muhammad Sarwar 'Ali Khan Saheb of Korwai and Major HH Fakhruddowla Nawab of Jaora, in NAI(B), BSR No. 107 (B. 85), 1923-24.

intermediate college.[57] On the occasion of his succession, Hamidullah Khan recognized these connections between Bhopal and Aligarh, claiming that his mother had joined the two cities in a "common unity" such that they were like "two bodies but with a single mind."[58]

Even without the Begam's involvement, the Muslim Ladies' Conference continued to meet a few times in the 1920s, but it had lost its earlier vitality after the furore of the 1918 meeting died down and the women fell prey to regional bickering.[59] Many of the early activists did, however, join with the younger generation and members of other religious groups in the late 1920s to establish the more constructive All-India Women's Conference. Despite their growing consciousness of a national sisterhood, Muslim women continued to feel that they needed a communal association to articulate their rights within the greater organization. After the 1928 meeting, over which she presided, the Begam of Bhopal met with Begam Shah Nawaz to encourage her to rejuvenate the practically defunct Muslim Ladies' Conference. They planned to hold a grand meeting at Bhopal to which prominent Muslim women from all over India would be invited.[60] Before they could act, a final 'all-India' meeting of the Conference was organized in Hyderabad in 1929, but it was attended nearly exclusively by women of that city. Shortly after, Sultan Jahan Begam expressed her disappointment with the organization by ceasing her essential grant, causing it to go bankrupt and cancel its monthly stipend to the Aligarh Girls' College. It was not long before the first significant all-India organization for Muslim women folded completely.[61]

Throughout its short existence, the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference remained dedicated to advancing education for Muslim women. In general, activities were confined to passing benign resolutions, although grants were, as mentioned above, provided to certain elite institutions. Unlike women leaders in Egypt and Turkey such as Huda Sha'rawi and Halidé Edib, members of the Conference were not interested in challenging the traditional roles of Muslim women. Though purdah was to be modified, they continued the practice of wearing the veil, as it was a symbol of Muslim culture and their own high status. Similarly, they abandoned their campaign against polygamy when it brought them into conflict with male reformers, as they feared undermining traditional gender hierarchies. Despite these

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[57] For the future development of the Aligarh Girls' School, see Minault, "Shaikh Abdullah," 230.

[58] 'Response of Nawab Hamidullah Khan to the address of the Muslim University Deputation' in Zuberi, *Asr-i-Jadid*, 62.

[59] See Hossain, *Rokeya*, 199-204.

[60] Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter*, 94.

[61] The Anjuman's decline is discussed in more detail in Minault, "Sisterhood or Separatism?," 96-103.

qualifications, the participation of elite Muslim women in the Conference is highly significant, since it represents their first foray into the public sphere. By remaining within conventional norms and building on their religious and family duties, Muslim 'ladies' were able to expand their role in society.

The All-India Ladies' Art Exhibition, Bhopal

Just a week after the inaugural All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference, Sultan Jahan Begam and her followers themselves played host to a national women's gathering, when the first independent women's exhibition was held in Bhopal.[62] Modelled on earlier women's crafts displays in Aligarh and Allahabad, it gave Indian women the opportunity to have their impressive handiwork publicly appreciated, judged and sold for profit. In doing this, Sultan Jahan Begam hoped to induce parents to send their girls to schools where such skills could be learned.[63] The exhibition itself, held over ten days in March, 1914, was hugely successful, attracting over sixteen hundred exhibits from nearly three hundred different places in India, as well as a number of secluded women, both from Bhopal and elsewhere, who rarely attended functions outside the home. They were enticed to the event by assurances in the Exhibition handbook that strict purdah arrangements would be made for all purdah ladies. This policy was confirmed at the grand opening, when only women were permitted to take part in the ceremony; even male members of the Managing Committee, who had been asked to attend, were required to stand outside, in a sort of reverse purdah.[64]

For the first five and a half days, the event continued to be open exclusively to women. As well as examining the exhibits, the women also met for various social functions such as garden parties and games' afternoons. On other days, there were special entertainments, including magic lantern displays, music concerts, fancy dress shows and table-laying competitions.[65] All of these segregated activities provided important opportunities for Bhopali women to meet and exchange ideas with elite women from other parts of India. The Bhopali exhibition, organized by women for members of their own sex, was exclusive in fulfilling this

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[62] The main women involved in organizing the event were Shah Bano Begam, the female president of the exhibition committee, and Abru Begam, the secretary, although Fatima Begam, Iqtidar Dulhan, Sardar Dulhan and other prominent women in the state also took part.

[63] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 74.

[64] A description of the opening ceremony, including the speeches given by Shah Bano Begam and Sultan Jahan Begam, is incorporated into *Decennial Report*, 5, 27-29, 116-117.

[65] *The All India Ladies' Art Exhibition Bhopal 1914*. Bhopal: Qudsia Press, 1914, 4-13.

function. Previous women's industrial exhibitions, which had been held in connection with male-dominated events, had not so thoroughly addressed women's needs; inadequate purdah arrangements had prevented them from viewing the exhibits properly or attending related functions. The autonomous nature of women's activities in Bhopal precluded such restrictions on female involvement. In fact, women's access was made the paramount concern.

The organizers of the exhibition, realizing that traditional norms would have to be stringently observed if women were to be encouraged to take part in public activities, made purdah requirements a first priority. This insistence on a separate female sphere allowed women to take leadership roles, learn organizational skills and build an all-India network, preparing them, somewhat paradoxically, for more overtly political activity in the future.[66] In doing this, the exhibition provided a similar function to the Women's Section of the Egyptian University, which sponsored lecture series given by women for women between 1909 and 1912.[67] Of course, the strong emphasis on the maintenance of purdah does suggest the limitations, as well as the advantages, of the Bhopali gathering. Though geographically diverse, the women were all of an elite class, which continued to wear the veil as a symbol of their socio-economic eminence and Muslim identity. By insisting on an accommodation of tradition, they prevented the women's movement from involving women of the lower classes or progressing to a more advanced stage of emancipation.

The All-India Ladies' Association[68]

The Begam of Bhopal was motivated to give the women of her state a second opportunity to organize an autonomous women's event, following a journey to Aligarh in 1916 to open Sultan Jahan Manzil, the new headquarters of the MEC. The report presented to her on this occasion confirmed her earlier belief that men could not be relied upon to give sufficient attention to the educational and social needs of women. For more than a quarter of a century, they had been mindlessly discussing the problem of female education, but, as yet,

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[66] Begam Shah Nawaz, in her autobiography, also makes the point that early women's organizations and meetings prepared her to be a "leader of tomorrow." Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter*, 15-16

[67] Malak Hifni Nasif, Nabawiyah Musa and many other leading figures of the Egyptian feminist movement were first involved in the Women's Section of the Egyptian University. See Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 185.

[68] An expanded version of this section is to be published as "Fostering Sisterhood: Muslim Women and the All-India Ladies' Conference, 1918-1920" in Sarah Ansari and Vanessa Martin, eds. *Gender and Society in the Muslim World*. London: I.B. Tauris, forthcoming.

they had only founded one girls' school with a boarding house, which served only a small number of students of the elite families of one place.[69] As the Begam explained in a pamphlet written later in 1916, their efforts had, however, produced a bright group of Muslim women, who were now prepared to take over the movement for the reform of their own sex. Already, these educated women had founded sectarian organizations, like the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference, which were valuable, though limited in scope. What was required was for Muslim women to unite with women of other communities, with whom their interests were "dexterously interwoven," in forming a strong national association. In this way, Indian women could become a powerful pressure group capable of achieving "unbounded" social and educational reforms. The Begam suggested that this All-India Ladies' Association be established at Bhopal.[70]

The first session of the Association was planned for late March, 1918, directly after the controversial meeting of the Muslim Ladies' Conference in Lahore. Despite the avowedly national character of the meeting, only a small number of Muslim, Christian and Hindu delegates attended from outside Bhopal. They were all, however, fairly eminent, being the wives or daughters of Aligarh trustees, princely state officials or wealthy merchants.[71] All of these women delegates from outside the state were ferried from the railway station in closed conveyances and accommodated at Sadr Manzil, one of the Begam's largest palaces in the centre of Bhopal city. The conference proceedings were also held here, so as to simplify purdah arrangements and foster a sense of camaraderie between the women participants.[72] As many other women invited to the conference could not participate, the attendance was boosted by a large number of women from the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club and other institutions in Bhopal. They included female educationalists and medical staff, as well as members of Bhopal's ruling family.[73] In total, there were around eighty participants.

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[69] Sultan Jahan Begam. "On Mahomedan Education" in *Speeches of Indian Princes on Politics*, 41-49.

[70] Sultan Jahan Begam. *A Scheme for Establishing an "Indian Ladies' Association" at Bhopal*. Bhopal: Qudsia Press, 1916, 1-2. Similar considerations led to the establishment of the Egyptian Feminist Union and other more explicitly feminist organizations in the 1920s. See Badran, *Feminists*, 86-88.

[71] Aligarh was represented by Nafis Dulhan, Begam Sarbuland Jang and Begam Khwaja Majid. Delegations from the princely states included Begam Humayon Mirza, Begam Amir Hasan, Begam Khadiv Jang and Sarojini Naidu from Hyderabad, Mrs. Hemanta Kumari Chowdhury from Patiala, and the Begam of Janjira. Zohra Faizi and Mrs. Mohsin Badruddin Tyabji represented the renowned merchant families of Bombay.

[72] Begam Humayon Mirza, *Roznamchah*, 2, 4.

[73] Staff representatives from Bhopal included Mrs. Baksh, Mrs. Johory, Abru Begam and Fatima Begam, all of whom were educationalists, as well as Miss F.M. Simmonds, a doctor, and Bismillah Khanam, the Sub-assistant Surgeon. Beyond the immediate family, the most notable delegates from Bhopal's ruling family were Iqtidar Dulhan and Sardar Dulhan.

Though smaller than the Muslim Ladies' Conference, the fledgling association received the patronage of several eminent personalities, including Lady Chelmsford, the Vicereine, Lady Willingdon, wife of Bombay's Lieutenant-Governor, and Lady O'Dwyer, wife of Punjab's Lieutenant-Governor.[74] Such names on the letterhead, along with that of the Begam of Bhopal, suggest that the All-India Ladies' Association could be identified, like the later NCWI, as being an elitist organization, which was modelled more on foreign expectations than indigenous sources. The reality was somewhat more complex. While members and patrons were indeed of a highly privileged class, their program of reform was shaped, not only by contact with the colonial power, but also by socio-religious factors that were pre-colonial in origin. This contention is confirmed by speeches given at the opening of the inaugural conference of the All-India Ladies' Association by Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam, president of the Reception Committee, and Sultan Jahan Begam, president of the Association. As will be seen, they represented both a link with the past and a break with tradition.

As in former lectures and texts, the Begams focussed on providing education and health care within the bounds of customary norms. The first priority of the Association was to promote cheap and accessible classes on hygiene, housekeeping and religion in order to better prepare girls to better fulfil the traditional duties of womanhood. The constraints of purdah also dictated that special training in midwifery, nursing and other professional subjects be provided to disadvantaged women, not only to protect them from poverty and indigence, but also to reduce the reliance of all Indian women on male practitioners. Similar considerations led to the promotion of vernacular education for girls, as opposed to the English education which was advocated for boys. As the custom of early marriage dictated that many girls had to leave school at a young age, the difficulties of imparting education in a short time had to be reduced. The only means of assuring this was to offer classes in the mother tongue.[75] This educational program revealed distinctly conservative influences; even in the context of the wider Muslim world, many activists had begun to advocate that both boys and girls follow the same modern curriculum.[76]

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[74] *A Short Summary of the Proceedings of the First Session of the All-India Ladies' Association*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1918, 1.

[75] Sultan Jahan Begam's presidential speech is printed in the original Urdu in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 162-174. It is translated into English in *Islamic Review* (Woking), 6 (Oct.-Nov., 1918), 363-366; and *Proceedings*, 4-8. Shah Bano Begam's speech as president of the Reception Committee is available in English in *Decennial Report*, 47-52.

[76] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 36, 54.

Despite their traditional approach, the Bhopali Begams also made an unprecedented plea for Indian women to take responsibility for their own uplift through independent women's organizations. Autonomy was an issue which the ruling Begam had raised on earlier occasions, but never in such a conspicuous fashion. She commenced her address by paying tribute to the work accomplished by existing women's organizations, like the Muslim Ladies' Conference, the Bengal Ladies' Conference, the Seva Sadan and the Bharat Stree Mahamandal. She asserted that these associations, though plagued by geographic and sectarian limitations, proved what Indian women were capable of contributing themselves towards the movement for women's rights. They also highlighted, however, the need for an "all-embracing and central" ladies' organization, which could represent women of all castes, creeds and denominations. Was it not true, the Begam asked, that all Indian woman, whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Parsi, required educational, social and legal reform?[77] Shah Bano Begam similarly urged her audience to follow the example of their sisters in Japan, China, Persia and Egypt in making a "strong and combined" effort to promote female education on a grand scale.[78]

The women of Bhopal, like their contemporaries in the Middle East, had evidently become aware of a national sisterhood, spanning caste and creed, which existed apart from their religious identity.[79] In order to promote this unity, Sultan Jahan Begam referred to historical figures and reformist efforts, not only in the Muslim community, but also among Hindus, Parsis and Christians. She admired Hindu reformist projects, like D.K. Karve's widows' home in Bombay, which had never before been alluded to in her speeches, before calling upon her listeners to emulate great women as diverse as 'Aisha, Sita, Florence Nightingale, Draupadi, Nur Jahan, Madame Montessori, Fatima and Anandibai Joshi.[80] By harking back to a universal golden age, when women were allegedly more prominent in public life, the Begam aimed, not only to draw women of different communities together, but also to root her program of reform within an indigenous framework. Such measures were necessary if she hoped to repudiate claims that the Association was trying to imitate too closely the activities of European women, which were deemed repugnant to the traditions and

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[77] Presidential speech of Sultan Jahan Begam in *Proceedings*, 5.
[78] Speech by Shah Bano Begam at All-India Ladies' Conference in *Decennial Report*, 50-51.
[79] Between 1914 and 1916, three new women's organizations were founded in Egypt, which had a non-sectarian membership base: the Jam'iyyat Ittihad al-Nisa' al-Tahdhibi, the Jam'iyyat al-Ruqiyy al-Adabi lil'l-Sayyidat al-Misriyat and the Jam'iyyat al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya. See Baron, *Women's Awakening*, 179-180.
[80] Presidential speech of Sultan Jahan Begam in *Proceedings*, 5-7.

"general good" of Indians.[81]

Over the subsequent four days, the women of the Association met to discuss and pass numerous resolutions, which, like the speeches of the above Begams, reflected both the enduring perceptions and the changing views of women in the Muslim community.[82] The first three resolutions referred to the oft-discussed topic of female education, encouraging the expansion of girls' schools throughout India which would offer an appropriate curriculum. Begam Khadiv Jang, an author and educationalist from Hyderabad,[83] spoke for the majority of women in attendance, when she argued that the existing system of female education was flawed, because it produced "anaemic bespectacled girl-graduates" rather than "healthy, intelligent women," who were capable of using their education to assist them in their daily lives as wives, mothers and Muslims. Despite her traditional approach, Begam Khadiv Jang also spoke in favour of establishing a women's college in each province and a women's university in a central spot in India, a suggestion that was highly innovative considering that most Muslims did not yet send their daughters to primary school.[84]

More controversial ideas on education were expressed by Iqtidar Dulhan, a resident of Bhopal, who was the daughter of Nawab Ishaq Khan, secretary of Aligarh College. Striking at the exclusivity of the *ashraf* class of Muslims, she argued that the character of a child was determined, not by heredity, but by the social and educational environment in which it was raised. For this reason, princes and peasants alike, as well as women, should be provided with the same type of education. In order to illustrate man's selfish condemnation of women to the "drudgery" of household duties, she referred to Indian women as "dolls in dolls' houses," seemingly evoking Ibsen's controversial play, *The Doll's House* (1879), just as was later done by nationalist intellectuals across Asia, including Nehru.[85] She contended that the time had come for women to right this grave injustice, regaining their lost position,

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[81] Quoted in Shah Bano's speech at the All-India Ladies' Conference in *Decennial Report*, 52.

[82] These resolutions are printed separately to the Conference report in *Copy of Resolutions*. Bhopal: Qudsia Press, 1918; and *Supplements to the Resolutions*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1918.

[83] Begam Khadiv Jang was the only daughter of Sayyid Husain Bilgrami (Nawab Imad-ul-Mulk), a prominent civil servant in the Hyderabad government, who was active in the Aligarh movement. As well as undergoing a remarkable educational career (she was awarded a B.A. from Madras University in 1910) and writing several works of fiction (notably *Anwari Begam*, a social novel that was serialized in *'Ismat* in 1909), she also played a vital role in the establishment of several early women's organizations, including the Hyderabad Ladies' Association, the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam and the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Dakkan. In 1919, she also presided over the disastrous All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference in Calcutta. She died in 1921, after an eighteen-month battle with breast cancer. See Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 208-213.

[84] Speeches by Begam Khadiv Jang on resolutions 1 and 2 in *Proceedings*, 8, 9.

[85] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 14.

by force, if need be.[86] In her short speech, Iqtidar Dulhan had attacked some of the fundamental aspects of the Muslim women's reform movement to this point. In outright opposition to the views of Sultan Jahan Begam, she had denied the validity of an earthly hierarchy, ridiculed the contributions of men to women's uplift, and encouraged a confrontational approach by female activists. Obviously, a more radical group of Muslim women was emerging.

Several resolutions were also passed in favour of extending medical aid to the women of India. After thanking Lady Hardinge, Lady O'Dwyer and Lady Willingdon for their contributions to the cause, the women encouraged the Government of India to direct more attention to the training of lady doctors and the provision of zenana hospitals. They departed from the position of their British mentors, however, in expressing that women's health initiatives should not focus exclusively on childbirth or the activities of the indigenous *dai*.[87] Improvements also needed to be made to the administrative machinery of the country, so as to improve sanitary measures in Indian towns and cities. One Muslim woman even suggested that a system of town planning could be introduced, as was prevalent in Britain. It was also resolved that the attention of women of all classes should be directed towards proper methods of domestic cleanliness and hygiene through various methods, including speeches, picture shows and published tracts, as had been done in Bhopal.[88]

Various other resolutions were also passed, which echoed the earlier writings and activities of Muslim male and female reformers, including Sultan Jahan Begam. First of all, the Association condemned the unnecessary expenditure on elaborate marriage ceremonies and other rites not enjoined by religion. It also appealed to all Indians to oppose the "evil" custom of child marriage, following the example of progressive men, like Raja Rammohun Roy and Justice Ranade, and the Begam of Bhopal. Significantly, the inclusion of this resolution was questioned by Miss M.E. Elton, a Christian teacher employed in the state, on the basis that their words were unlikely to carry any weight if their leaders continued to follow the customs that they hoped to eradicate.[89] Seemingly, she was referring to the fact that Sultan Jahan Begam had married her youngest son, Hamidullah Khan, to Shah Bano Begam,

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[86] Speech by Iqtidar Dulhan in *Proceedings*, 12.
[87] For more on the imperial discourse on childbirth, see Forbes, "Managing Midwifery," 152-172.
[88] Speeches of Begam Sarbuland Jang, Mrs. Jamshedji, Fatima Begam and Begam Rashida Latif on resolutions 4, 5 and 7 in *Proceedings*, 12-14.
[89] Speech of Miss M.E. Elton on resolution 10 in *Proceedings*, 17.

when they were just seven and five years old. Like Ranade and other child marriage reformers, who had been chastised for marrying girls nearly twenty years their junior, the ruling Begam had, in other forums, defended this act on the basis that her society was located between tradition and modernity; as she had no chance of finding an educated girl for her son before he reached the age of majority, she had chosen a young bride whom she could educate herself.[90] Miss Elton's comment appears to have been overlooked, at the time, by the rest of the Association's members, but, soon after the incident, she disappears from Bhopal's employment records.

In order to make the declaration on child marriage more effective, it was decided by the Association that committees of "influential" women should be formed in various provinces to convince the guardians of young girls that it was detrimental to both their health and morals to marry them before they had reached the age of maturity. Local groups were also to be established to promote social intercourse between the women of different provinces, nationalities and religions, as had been done in Bhopal in the form of the Princess of Wales' Ladies' Club. With this aim in mind, it was also agreed to extend the scope of the All-India Ladies' Exhibition, which had earlier been held at Bhopal, and make a contribution to women's journalism by publishing a journal in English, Urdu and Hindi, which would provide useful information on the organization and other women's activities.[91] All of these planned practical measures represented an extension of previous efforts. As before, the women defended their actions on the basis of scriptural sources and earlier events in Islamic history. For example, it was argued that associations for women of different creeds were acceptable, because Islam had encouraged Muslim women to "cultivate friendly relations with women of other religions." Similarly, the decision to hold more women's crafts exhibitions was justified on the basis that *mina* bazaars were a regular event in the Mughal period.[92] Discussion on the most contentious item on the agenda, the resolution relating to purdah, also relied on evidence from early Islam. The women's interpretations were, however, often contradictory.

Sughra Humayon Mirza, editor of the Hyderabad women's journal, *un-Nisa*,[93]

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[90] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 225. For comparisons with Ranade, see Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 25-26.

[91] Speeches of Abru Begam and Fatima Arzu Begam on resolutions 8 and 12 in *Proceedings*, 14-15, 17-18.

[92] Speeches of Aftab Begam and Begam Rashida Latif on resolutions 8 and 12 in *Proceedings.*, 15, 18.

[93] Sughra Humayon Mirza, wife of a prosperous barrister, edited *un-Nisa*, a monthly publication dedicated to social reform and creative literature, between 1917 and 1927. She later edited *Zebunnissa*, a more wide-ranging journal with greater political content, that was published in Lahore from 1934 into the 1940s. See Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 151-152.

presented the resolution on purdah, which stated that, in the opinion of the conference, the existing form of purdah in India should be reduced in its severity so that it was no longer a barrier to women's educational and cultural advancement. For Muslim women, this meant that the stringency of the purdah system should not go beyond the limits enjoined by their religion. Begam Humayon Mirza had already proven herself to be a strong proponent of this position, fearlessly speaking out against what she referred to as the "false" purdah system in the introductory pages of her travelogue, *Roznamchah Safar Bhopal*.[94] She developed these sentiments in her conference address, claiming that purdah, as it was prevalent in India, was responsible for keeping Muslim women more ignorant than their Hindu and Middle Eastern sisters. Even in costly zenana *madrasas*, Muslim women could not gain the wideness of vision required by women of their age. They needed the opportunity, not only to receive a school education, but also to learn from experience: to travel by trains and ships, to hear the lectures of learned scholars, to visit forests and fields.

Begam Humayon Mirza assured her audience that she did not, of course, intend for them to follow the example of European women and abandon the purdah altogether. Rather, she was advocating a return to what was practiced during the early days of Islam. In that era, women had the freedom to accompany their menfolk onto the battlefield, participate in public meetings and attend religious services. Certain gifted women had even acquired knowledge of the highest order on religious and secular subjects, which they both wrote about and taught to male and female disciples. This conduct, according to the Begam, was in keeping with the Qur'an, since all it said about purdah was that both men and women should refrain from seeing each other with bad intentions. In Muslim countries, like Morocco, Egypt, Turkey and Arabia, this passage had been interpreted to mean that, when women left the house, they should wear a baggy cloak and a shawl over their heads. Beyond this modest attire, there was no restriction on their movement. Indian women, in contrast, were treated as prisoners, without any feelings or opinions. They were deprived of education, physical exercise and fresh air such that, not only their own minds and bodies were weakened, but also those of their progeny. Evidently, the Begam submitted, the time had come for them to establish a more Islamic system in India with which they could all live comfortably.[95] These arguments

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[94] Begam Humayon Mirza, *Roznamchah*, 3. For further discussion, see chapter V.

[95] Speech by Begam Humayon Mirza on resolution 9, in *Roznamchah*, 14-23. Her speech is also summarized in *Proceedings*, 15-16.

were identical to those advanced by various women, including Begam Humayon Mirza, in the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference meetings of the same period.

Her lengthy speech was enthusiastically supported by Begam Anis Hamid and Husn Ara Begam, both of Bhopal, who once again emphasized that they were only promoting a form of purdah, which was prevalent in the "golden" days of Islam. They quoted examples of learned Arabian women, including Umm Hani, Hamida and Khadija bint 'Ali, who had taught in large public forums in the medieval era.[96] Though these women were exemplary, education, unhampered by purdah, was also essential for women in general. "Ignorant mothers meant ignorant children," they asserted, "and purdah meant ignorant mothers."[97] Their message paralleled the earlier writings of more radical male reformers, like Sayyid Amir 'Ali and Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali, who had also encouraged a lessening of purdah restrictions. That such opinions were now being expressed by Muslim women themselves in a respectable public forum indicates that the movement for women's rights was indeed advancing on to another stage. Its progress was, however, curbed by more cautious female reformers, like Abru Begam, who virulently denounced the purdah resolution. She contended that the presence at their gathering of so many learned *purdahnashin* proved that education was being adequately supplied in zenana schools, like those available in Bhopal and Aligarh. Since education could be carried on behind the existing purdah, what was the purpose, she asked, of reducing its restrictiveness? Begam Amir Hasan, of the Hyderabad delegation, responded that they simply wanted the liberties guaranteed to women by Islam.[98]

Sarojini Naidu, also of Hyderabad, privately commented that it was a terrible pity that Muslim women were so divided over demanding their rights.[99] In fact, this division was one of the defining factors of the conference, symbolizing the changing times for Indian Muslim women. A group of progressive, young women was emerging, who wished to build on the gains achieved by the pioneering group of female activists.[100] Following the example of

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[96] For the activities of these women, see Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 113-114.

[97] Speeches of Begam Anis Hamid and Roshan Ara Begam on resolution 9 in *Proceedings*, 16.

[98] Speeches of Abru Begam and Begam Amir Hasan in Begam Humayon Mirza, *Roznamchah*, 24; and *Proceedings*, 16.

[99] Begam Humayon Mirza, *Roznamchah*, 24.

[100] Sarojini Naidu herself commented that the conference reflected the changes that were "in the air." In a speech given at the Kanya Maha Vidyalaya in Jalandhar on the 30 of March, 1918, she reported that even the "old matrons," who had attended the conference, had agreed that their daughters required a comprehensive education, which would teach them the means of earning a living, as well as the love of God and their country. They had also, she noted, come to the radical conclusion that purdah did not mean that a woman should be treated like an "incarcerated criminal." See "Emancipation of Indian Women" in Grover and Arora, *Sarojini Naidu*, 98-99.

women of the older generation, like Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam, they remained, for the most part, within the bounds of Islam, but pushed societal norms beyond conventional understandings. For this reason, many of their initiatives, including the extension of women's higher education, women's journalism and women's arts and crafts exhibitions, were accepted. Their more radical proposals, however, such as the lessening of purdah restrictions, were contested by the more traditionally-minded. Women, like Abru Begam, who had received a comprehensive education in the Islamic sciences tended to scorn such revisionism.

Having managed the great feat of bringing together women of different castes and creeds in an independent all-India organization, Sultan Jahan Begam was eager to unite opinion on the divisive purdah resolution. In a special address, read out by Shah Bano Begam, she dictated that, as the existing purdah system was not in keeping with the scriptural sources of Islam, the women in India should adopt a less rigid form of purdah, like that practiced in Arabia.[101] Seemingly, she was referring to the practice in countries like Turkey, where even elite women, like Halidé Edib, moved about freely, wearing a cloak and a sheer face-covering.[102] This interpretation was certainly more liberal than that which was promoted in her important work, *Al-Hijab or Why Purdah is Necessary*.(see chapter I) Her recommendation of such proposals confirms her position as one of a small vanguard of Muslim women who introduced more innovative ideas to the next generation of reformers. The Begam of Bhopal evidently aimed to foster this connection by travelling to Hyderabad in September, 1918 to meet with some of the more progressive women who had attended her conference in Bhopal.[103]

Although the All-India Ladies' Association had agreed to convene the following year in Bhopal, a second meeting was not announced until 1920, when the professed objects of the conference, as articulated at the first meeting, were detailed in women's journals and special pamphlets. As before, the Association explicitly shunned politics or any other "controversial" subject, which would represent a break with women's traditional sphere of activity.[104] This 'non-political' marker appears to have arrested the growth of the Association in an era when large numbers of Indians were becoming involved in the nationalist movement. Even at the

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[101] Unlike her other speeches, this address is not printed, or even mentioned, in *Proceedings*. It is, however, printed in the original Urdu in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 175-178.
[102] Edib, *Memoirs*, 362-366.
[103] Speech to the Khawatin-i-Dakkan in Hyderabad, 3 Sept., 1918 in Baksh, *Silk-i-Shahwar*, 179-182.
[104] *The Rules of the All India Ladies' Conference*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1919, 1-2, 5; extract from *Stridharma* (Madras), 1 (Jul., 1920), 151.

inaugural meeting, women members, like Begam Humayon Mirza and Begam Khwaja Majid, had been eager to discuss more political topics such as Home Rule when the conference was out of session.[105] As the Khilafat movement came to the fore in the early 1920s, collaboration with the government, as it was advocated by women's social reform organizations, like the All-India Ladies' Association and the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference, was viewed with increasing suspicion by politicized women. They turned their attention to anti-government activities, which were led by female nationalists, like Bi Amman and Begam Hasrat Mohani.(see chapter IV) Other women leaders, like the Begam of Bhopal, who remained dedicated to the British Crown, undoubtedly feared that these members would express opinions which would jeopardize their own loyalist position if the associations were to meet. As a result, the only women's organizations which flourished in the post-war years were openly political groups, like the Women's Indian Association and the women's auxiliaries of political parties. The second meeting of the All-India Ladies' Association did not materialize. Nevertheless, its aim of drawing elite Muslim women together with women of other communities in an autonomous all-India organization was not forgotten, as is evident from the establishment of the NCWI and AIWC in the late 1920s.

National Council of Women in India

Throughout the Khilafat-non-cooperation movement of the early 1920s, Sultan Jahan Begam expressed her antipathy to women's participation in explicitly political causes by distancing herself from national women's organizations. As a result, when Margaret Cousins, founder of the WIA, wrote to the Begam in 1921, encouraging her to support the fledgling Madras-based association and its journal, *Stridharma*, she did not receive a reply.[106] It was only in 1924, with the resolution of the Khilafat movement, that the Begam offered a more favourable reaction to such requests, in particular, a letter from Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji regarding the establishment of a National Council of Women in India. Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji and other Bombay women were attempting, on the suggestion of the Marchioness of Aberdeen, to affiliate women's organizations in India with the International Council of Women that had been established in the United States of America in 1888 to advance women's social, economic and political rights. This aim of making links with international

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[105] Begam Humayon Mirza, *Roznamchah*, 26.
[106] Margaret E. Cousins, HS, WIA, to Sultan Jahan Begam, 27 Feb., 1921, in NAI(B), BSR No. 36 (B. 71), 1921.

women's alliances was similar to that being pursued by women's organizations throughout the colonized world at this time, including the Egyptian Feminist Union.[107] For advice, Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji naturally turned to the Begam of Bhopal, as she was a respected reformist leader with whom friendly connections had been made at social gatherings in England and India. Though the ruling Begam was eager to assist, she was not able to as, at the time, she was occupied with the fatal illnesses of her two elder sons.[108]

Over the next year, women's associations and clubs in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Patna were united, first, under local councils, then, as a national organization. Cornelia Sorabji, as a representative of the International Council of Women, once again addressed the Begam of Bhopal to request her involvement. Members of the newly formed National Council of India desired her, as the "foremost Indian lady," to be the organization's first president.[109] As she was in the midst of a succession dispute with the British government,(see chapter IV) the Begam had, once again, to refuse an active role. She did agree, however, to be a life patron of the organization, along with the Maharani of Baroda, another reforming Indian princess, and Lady Dorab Tata, wife of India's most important industrialist.[110] Undoubtedly, this was because the Council, being socially and politically conservative, conformed, to a large degree, to the Begam's reformist ideals.

The NCWI was led by wealthy and titled women, including Cornelia Sorabji, Lady Tata and Mrs. Shaffi Tyabji, who modelled their activities on the philanthropic style of upper-class British women. Despite these foreign influences, they maintained that the special and separate function of Indian women was to fulfil social and domestic responsibilities, both in the home and the government. Their intention was to free men to improve the political and economic conditions of the country, not to foster antagonism between the sexes as was present in the West. Rather than pursuing projects in poor neighbourhoods, which could harm their social status, they dedicated themselves to petitioning the government to bring about

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[107] See Badran, *Feminists*, 108.

[108] Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji to Sultan Jahan Begam, 19 Aug., 1924; Qazi 'Ali Haidar Abbasi to Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji, 26 Aug., 1924; Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji to Haidar Abbasi, 19 Oct., 1924; Haidar Abbasi to Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji, 20 Aug., 1924, in NAI(B), BSR No. 189 (B. 93), 1923-24. Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji became a leading member of both the NCWI and the AIWC, serving on the women's franchise committee to the second round table conference in 1931, before being elected as president of the AIWC in 1934. She was also the co-founder of the Lady Irwin College for Home Science, Educational and Psychological Research and Training Teachers, which was established in Delhi in 1932. Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, 21, 56, 72.

[109] Cornelia Sorabji to Sultan Jahan Begam, 1 Sept., 1925, in NAI(B), BSR No. 91 (B. 108), 1926.

[110] Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 77.

requisite changes in health and welfare. Most women involved with the Council were already closely affiliated with British interests, so this style of social work was suited to their position. The elite stature of the women also meant, however, that their organization was distanced from nationalist politics and the majority of Indian women. Naturally, this limited its effectiveness, particularly in the years leading up to independence.[111] One can see how the Begam of Bhopal fitted into such an elite and traditional organization. Yet she was also interested in forging links with women of other classes and political backgrounds. She did this, as will be seen in the following section, through involvement in the All-India Women's Conference in the late 1920s.

The All-India Women's Conference

Social and educational advancement in India meant that educated and broad-minded women finally gathered, irrespective of caste and creed, to hold their own educational conference in 1927. In doing this, they fulfilled aspirations expressed by the Begam of Bhopal nearly ten years before at the All-India Ladies' Association meeting, although they were actually responding to a more immediate challenge by the Director of Public Instruction in Bengal. In 1926, E.F. Oaten invited Indian women to inform the government, with "one voice," what changes they wished to see in female education. Margaret Cousins and other women of the WIA immediately set about organizing a national conference, which would discuss educational issues in view of preparing a memorandum for the government. The All-India Women's Conference on Educational Reform met for the first time in Poona in January, 1927, under the presidency of the Maharani of Baroda. Well over two thousand women and men, including social reformers, nationalists, professional educationalists and the landed elite, attended the inaugural meeting, a vast number when compared to the eleven women who had met at Huda Sha'rawi's house four years earlier to found the Egyptian Feminist Union.[112] The founding members agreed that women required an education that would allow them to fulfil, to the highest degree, their innate intellectual potential. Yet their training also needed to recognize women's special nature. As well as academic subjects, girls ought to be taught the ideals of motherhood, domestic skills and the rudiments of social service.[113]

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[111] *Ibid.*, 76-78; and Forbes, "From Purdah to Politics," 226.
[112] See Badran, *Feminists*, 96.
[113] Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, 4-10.

In the modern era, the spread of female education had been restricted, as the Maharani of Baroda pointed out in her presidential address, by certain social customs, including purdah and child marriage. For this reason, the Conference also came out in favour of facilitating zenana education and proscribing marriage before the age of sixteen years.[114] The importance of easing 'evil' social customs was a topic that became even more central to the Conference the following year when it met in Delhi under the presidency of the now Dowager Begam of Bhopal. She was accompanied from her state by a lively delegation, which consisted of several educationalists,[115] her three spirited granddaughters and the new Begam of Bhopal, Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam. The meeting was also well attended by a wide range of politically active Muslim women from elsewhere in India, including Begam Ansari, Begam Muhammad 'Ali, Begam Sarbuland Jang, Begam Shareefah Hamid 'Ali, Begam Shah Nawaz and Lady 'Abdul Qadir, all of whom were eager to discuss, in particular, the limits of purdah observance.[116] Undoubtedly, their interest in this topic was influenced by the recent unveiling of several prominent women across the Muslim world; Huda Sha'rawi, president of the Egyptian Feminist Union, Latife Hanem, wife of the Turkish president, and Surayya, Queen of Afghanistan, had all abandoned the veil in the 1920s.[117]

In her inaugural address, the Dowager Begam not only broached issues that she had discussed in earlier writings and speeches, but also introduced many new and progressive ideas, which symbolized the advance in the movement for women's rights. After quoting the oft-repeated adage that female education was necessary for the betterment of the entire nation, she asserted that this cause had been impeded in India by "old and antiquated customs" that were "clothed in the sanctity of religion." Interestingly, she ignored the imputations on the role of the 'Islamic invasion' in transmitting some of these customs to India, even employing 'golden age' rhetoric, as had been done at the AIWC the year before and at the All-India Ladies' Association in 1918. Evidently, at this point, the issue of which community was to blame for 'the fall' had not become as critical to female leaders, for whom the political game was still new, as it had to their male counterparts. Only in the 1930s, after the death of the Begam, was the issue contested by Muslim women, leading to their alienation from the

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[114] These resolutions were proposed by Begam Shareefah Hamid 'Ali of Sindh and Jelal Shah of Maharashtra, respectively. AIWC on Educational Reform, Poona (Jan., 1927), 28-32.
[115] The educationalists included Abru Begam, Fatima Begam, Miss Oliphant and Miss S.M. Paul.
[116] AIWC on Educational Reform, Delhi (Feb., 1928), 1, 4, 7.
[117] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 13.

Conference.[118] In 1928, Sultan Jahan Begam simply urged members of the Conference to go beyond passing censorious resolutions, as had been done the year before, and actively protest against these practices throughout India.[119]

Though she spoke vehemently against child marriage and extravagant expenditure on life-cycle ceremonies, the imprudent custom that she most wanted to reform was purdah. Reversing her views as they were written in earlier theoretical works, the Begam made a bold pronouncement against the system as it was practiced by the Muslims of India, declaring:

> I have no hesitation to own that the purdah system as it is observed among Muslims of India is not exactly Islamic and is indeed very harmful to the progress of education among our girls. It is a hindrance moreover in the way of their physical and mental development. The Musalmans should cooly and calmly reflect and decide whether by respecting a mere custom they would keep their women in a state of suspended animation, whether they would sacrifice the prospect of their future generations at the altar of blind prejudice.[120]

Such ideas represented a radical departure from her earlier position, in which she strongly promoted the maintenance of purdah norms, as well as a step forward from opinions expressed at the All-India Ladies' Association. Evidently, she no longer believed that a satisfactory education could be provided to girls while they remained in seclusion. Her emerging opinions were closely in keeping with those of the rising generation of Muslim female reformers, which included Begam Shah Nawaz and Begam Shareefah Hamid 'Ali.

Having expressed these progressive sentiments, Sultan Jahan Begam returned to more prudent matters. She reiterated the need for separate syllabuses of education for boys and girls, which took into account their different mental constitutions. "Woman was not meant by nature," she asserted, "to take part in the struggles of life or to compete with man in the domain peculiarly his own." As such, she need an education that would enable her to "help man in his struggles, to comfort him in his troubles and create a happy home." This did not mean that certain women should not be allowed to enter the learned professions, particularly as teachers, but it was a general guideline to follow. Having defined the limits of this separate female sphere, the Begam again hinted at a more radical vision of Indian society. She urged the women in her audience to have faith in their ability to shape their own destinies and work their own salvation. Throughout the pages of history, she expounded, there were fine

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[118] See Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 80.

[119] The presidential speech of Sultan Jahan, Dowager Begam of Bhopal. was printed in AIWC on Educational Reform, Delhi (Feb., 1928), 23-31, as well as *Stridharma* (Madras), 10 (Mar., 1928), 71-72.

[120] AIWC (Feb., 1928), 28.

examples of women, both Hindu and Muslim, who had completed "heroic deeds," proving themselves to be equal with men in every walk of life. Women's potential was only limited, she maintained, by their lack of proper training.[121]

These seemingly contradictory ideas reflect the changing nature of the women's movement in the late 1920s. Though Muslim women were constrained on certain issues by traditional interpretations of their religion, they continued to seek a more progressive overall approach as was advocated by their more advanced Hindu sisters. In fact, there was, as the Begam identified, a trade off occurring between women of the two communities. Muslim women were willing to support Hindu women in the campaign to raise the age of marriage, if Hindu women supported them in their efforts to reduce purdah restrictions. This situation was unique; although Muslim and Christian feminists worked together in Egypt, they never became involved in campaigns to reform the personal status codes of the other.[122] In doing just this, Indian Muslim women found themselves in conflict with male leaders of their community as never before. One of the key achievements of the 1928 meeting of the AIWC was that deputations on child marriage were organized to wait on the Viceroy and other political leaders, which included prominent Muslim women, including Begam Hamid 'Ali and Begam Sarbuland Jang. Their case was condemned in strong terms by Muhammad 'Ali Jinnah of the Muslim League, who felt that any attempt to curb the custom would conflict with Islamic law.[123] Muslim women, including Sultan Jahan Begam, were again zealously attacked by male Muslim leaders, including Dr. Ansari and Maulana Muhammad 'Ali, when they supported the Sarda Act to raise the age of marriage. Despite these threats, Muslim women continued to uphold their alliance with Hindu women, presenting memorials to the Viceroy in which they deliberately disputed the opinions of Muslim men.[124]

Similarly, purdah became a important issue for the AIWC. After the Begam's condemnation of the existing system in 1928, resolutions were passed each year in favour of limiting the severity of the custom. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, vigorous propaganda campaigns were launched, especially in North India where the practice was most strict, to

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[121] *Ibid.*, 29-31.

[122] Badran, *Feminism, Islam, and Nation*, 95-96.

[123] AIWC (Feb., 1928), 75-79.

[124] See Muhammad 'Ali's "Muslims and the Sarda Act" in Afzal Iqbal, compiled and ed. *Select Writings and Speeches of Maulana Mohamed Ali.* Vol. II. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963, 321-343. A good summary of the debate over child marriage, including between male and female Muslim leaders, is available in Geraldine Forbes. "Women and Modernity: The Issue of Child Marriage in India," *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 2, 4 (1979), 407-419.

publicize the harmful effects and encourage mixed gatherings. At the same time, Muslim members of the AIWC, most notably, Lady 'Abdul Qadir, urged the Conference to respect purdah norms in the hope that more Muslim women would be encouraged to attend meetings.[125] Many of those who did join later gave up the purdah themselves, particularly if they became involved with the freedom movement.[126] Despite these collective efforts, a divide did occur between the women of different communities over the matter of legal reform. Unlike their Hindu sisters, Muslim women felt, then, as now, that their rights would be better protected by Muslim personal law, as defined in the *shariah*, than by a uniform civil code. For this reason, Muslim women remained a small and separate group within the AIWC.[127]

In her concluding remarks at the 1928 Conference, Sultan Jahan Begam noted that the "interest and enthusiasm" displayed by the women in attendance augured well for the future of the AIWC and the women's movement in general. Though she felt that some of the resolutions which had been passed, most likely those relating to female suffrage and women's higher education, were somewhat premature, she was impressed by the general awakening that was occurring amongst the women of India. It was evident in their decision to limit such deleterious practices as child marriage and purdah. She warned them, however, not to brashly attack certain customs, which were believed to have the sanction of religion, as this could lead to "unpleasant controversies" that could be harmful to their cause. Such comments reflect the pragmatism that had influenced her program of reform throughout her life. Her traditional approach was also revealed in her censure of the AIWC's policy on language. Echoing her criticism of the Bharat Stree Mahamandal nearly twenty years before, she argued that Conference proceedings should be carried out in a vernacular language. This would not only be a practical step, but an illustration of their pride in Indian culture.[128]

These statements of the Dowager Begam of Bhopal at the second annual All-India Women's Conference display how she brought both continuity and innovation to the existing movement for women's reform. Unfortunately, her advancing age and frail physique curtailed further contributions to the organization. Though both she and Shah Bano Begam remained on the list of patronesses, neither were actively involved in the years to come. No branch of

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[125] Lady Abdul Qadir. "Muslim Views on Purdah and Marriage" in *Stridharma* (Madras), 14 (Feb., 1931), 184.
[126] For the AIWC's efforts to limit purdah restrictions, see Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, 70-73.
[127] Minault, "Sisterhood or Separatism?," 101.
[128] AIWC (Feb., 1928), 71-73.

the AIWC was started in Bhopal, nor did the state send delegates to subsequent meetings.[129] Nevertheless, the influence of Bhopal's women continued to be felt. Throughout the 1930s, the radical sentiments which had been expressed in Sultan Jahan Begam's presidential speech, particularly with regard to purdah, continued to be quoted by women of the AIWC.[130]

Conclusions

In the concluding section of her presidential speech at the 1928 meeting of the AIWC, Sultan Jahan Begam once again emphasized the importance of acting on the principles expressed in reformist tracts and speeches. "Mere words are not enough," she asserted, "to bring about success in any movement." What was needed was a vibrant all-India association, which would co-ordinate practical activities for women's uplift.[131] In the first decades of the twentieth century, the Begam and her troupe of female activists from Bhopal sought to initiate such an organization. Their male predecessors had made similar efforts in the form of women's auxiliaries to national organizations, like the Ladies' Social Conference and the Female Section of the Muhammadan Educational Conference. But these groups, bounded by a male agenda and side-lined to male interests, had not proved constructive. The new female activists believed that only women could properly understand women's problems and act to alleviate them. This demand for autonomy was the major feature of women's political activity in the early part of the century.

The political emergence of Muslim women in India is exemplified by the changing style of involvement by Bhopali women in reform movements and national organizations between 1901 and 1930. As is evident from the Begam of Bhopal's consistent support of the Aligarh Girls' School and other Aligarh projects, Muslim women first aimed to further female education and women's arts by supporting the existing efforts of male Muslim leaders, like Shaikh 'Abdullah, Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali and Sayyid Karamat Hussain. These men initially discouraged any independent reformist activity by women, including the small 1905 gathering at Aligarh, on the basis that such action conflicted with women's traditional roles. Early Muslim women leaders such as the Begam of Bhopal, Begam 'Abdullah and Zohra Faizi were able to counter these objections by defending their activities on the basis of Islam and strictly

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[129] See annual reports for the AIWC in 1929 (Patna), 1930 (Bombay) and subsequent years.
[130] See, for example, the presidential speech of Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji in AIWC, Karachi (Dec., 1934).
[131] AIWC (Feb., 1928), 31.

observing conventional norms. When they met to found the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference in Aligarh in 1914, they focussed on providing elite Muslim women, like themselves, with religious and domestic education so that they could better fulfil their traditional roles. This was an aim that continued to be central to the reformist program of Indian women, unlike their contemporaries in the Middle East, throughout the period.

The earliest women's organizations and activities, including the Muslim Ladies' Conference, the Bharat Stree Mahamandal and the All-India Ladies' Art Exhibition, were all constrained by socio-economic, religious and geographic limitations. Nevertheless, they played an important role in fostering a sense of solidarity among women of particular communities. It was not until the Begam of Bhopal founded the All-India Ladies' Association in 1918 that this fellowship began to encompass elite women of different regions and religions. At the same time, female activists, particularly of the younger generation, began to take a deeper interest in other reformist issues, like philanthropy and women's rights, rather than just female education. Many of these pursuits, including women's suffrage and the prohibition of polygamy, were considered too radical by older, more moderate reformers, like Sultan Jahan Begam, who feared the social consequences of undermining the existing hierarchical scheme of societal relations. Nevertheless, the Begam and other Muslim women of her generation were united with younger, more progressive women, including Sarojini Naidu, in national women's organizations in the late 1920s. These associations advocated policies such as raising the legal age of marriage, which brought Bhopali women into open conflict with male Muslim leaders with whom they had earlier concurred, not only on social reform matters, but also on openly political issues, as will be seen in the subsequent chapter.

IV: Political Activism at the National Level

Introduction

In the early twentieth century, female activists from Bhopal, like elite women elsewhere, focussed their public work primarily on social reform and women's emancipation. Yet their political activities were not exclusively gender oriented. By the early 1910s, they were beginning to show an interest in pertinent social and religious movements at a national level, negotiating a space within a previously male-dominated political environment. The period investigated precedes the mass nationalist movements of the 1930s and 1940s, which involved large numbers of militant women and led to the eventual dissolution of the princely states, but it does encompass a momentous time in both Indian Muslim and princely politics. It includes, not only the Balkan wars, the Muslim University movement, World War I and the Khilafat movement, but also the formation of the Chiefs' Conference and the Chamber of Princes, as well as the start of people's movements within the states. Sultan Jahan Begam, as the ruler of an important Muslim state, was particularly vocal on these prominent issues, which affected her position both as an autocratic princely ruler and an *ashraf* Muslim.[1]

It has been seen in previous chapters that pragmatism was the guiding principle behind Sultan Jahan Begam's efforts for social reform: when introducing change, she sought to build on customary observances, rather than wholly embracing new or foreign ideas, which would be unacceptable to her more reactionary compatriots. Similarly, in her relations with both the British and members of her own community, she displayed her ability to balance political realism with her own personal convictions. The Begam of Bhopal was renowned for her patronage of a wide range of Muslim individuals and institutions. As well as providing essential funding to partisan educational institutions at Aligarh, Deoband and Nadwa, she also remained in contact with Muslim leaders of all facets of the political spectrum, including Shaikh 'Abdullah, Dr. M.A. Ansari, Maulana Shibli and Hakim Ajmal Khan. Yet she also flaunted her loyalty to the colonial government, behaved as a link between the British and Muslim communities and played an active role in princely conferences. In this way, she was able to guarantee her position as an honoured leader of the Indian Muslims and a respected ally of the British rulers, as well as the independence of her state under British paramountcy. Neither her predecessors, nor her successor, nor even her fellow Muslim princes, proved to

[1] This chapter will not significantly discuss Sultan Jahan's internal administration, unless it had implications for national politics. Bhopal's administrative history has been sufficiently addressed in Mittal, *History of Bhopal State.*

be as successful in accomplishing these aims.

A Tradition of Loyalty?: Relations between the British and the Begams of Bhopal

As was noted in the introductory chapter, several important academic studies have appeared in recent years, which focus on diplomatic relations between the princes and the British in the years leading up to Indian independence. The majority of these writings tend to be overshadowed by the princes' ultimate demise, although an effort has been made by Ian Copland to consider historical events in the context in which they occurred.[2] The emphasis remains, however, on how the princes as a group emerged onto the all-India political stage to elicit guarantees of their status and authority from the British, before being relegated to the position of figurehead rulers on the departure of their patrons from the sub-continent.[3] These are undoubtedly important themes that require further study. But attention also needs to be given to the dynamics of the relationship between the British and particular states at other points in history in order to show that the workings of paramountcy were neither monolithic, nor always doomed to collapse. The Bhopal example offers clear evidence of this.

Formal relations were initiated between the British and the Nawabs of Bhopal in 1818, following the signing of a treaty of friendship by officers of the East India Company and Nazar Muhammad Khan. In fact, cordial relations had already been established between the two parties as early as 1778, when the ruling Nawab had provided all possible aid to an English army which was marching through his territory. Nearly all subsequent histories of Bhopal, whether written by British officers, the Nawab Begams or other Indian authors, emphasize that contact between the local rulers and the foreign overlord remained strictly harmonious after this first meeting.[4] Nawab Sikandar Begam, in particular, was acclaimed for having remained loyal to the British, even during the darkest days of the Mutiny, when her own mother and the Bhopali '*ulama* were urging her to rebel. It was grandly written by a contemporary British officer that her actions on this occasion had proved her to be "true to the traditions of her country, to her plighted word, to the sentiments of truth and honour."[5]

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[2] Copland, *Princes*, 13-14.

[3] See, for example, Ramusack, *Princes*.

[4] See, for example, A. Vadivelu. *The Ruling Chiefs, Nobles and Zamindars of India*. Vol. I. Madras: G.C. Loganadhan Bros., 1915, 85.

[5] G.B. Malleson. *An Historical Sketch of The Native States of India in Subsidiary Alliance with the British Government*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875, 205. Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, similarly honoured Sikandar in a speech given during his visit to Bhopal in 1912. See Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 209.

The steadfastness of certain princes during the rebellion, including Bhopal, Hyderabad and Gwalior, convinced the British government of the importance of keeping the princes as allies, rather than alienating them through a policy of further annexation; should another mutiny occur, they could once again be "the raj's salvation."[6]

Sikandar's daughter and successor, Shah Jahan Begam, was similarly honoured for her loyalty in the public speeches and writings of various Viceroys and other British officers in the late nineteenth century. A British government memorandum on the "Native Chiefs" written late in her reign asserted that, though she was not the great administrator that her mother was, she was no "unworthy successor," as she was "distinguished by the same loyalty to the British Crown."[7] Yet her example gives the first clue to the discrepancies between the public word and the private reality of contact between the British and the Begams. Despite there being no mention of tension in the above memorandum, confidential government files document that complications arose from 1881, when high officials in the Foreign Department were informed of the compilation and circulation of "seditious" works on *jihad*, or religious war, by Siddiq Hasan Khan, Shah Jahan Begam's second husband and a prominent member of the Ahl-i-Hadith movement.[8] Though fears of Bhopali disloyalty were initially placated by Colonel Henry Daly, a sympathetic Agent of the Governor-General in Central India (AGG), the situation came to a peak under his successor, Sir Lepel Henry Griffin, when the Nawab-consort persisted in disseminating his publications. Late in 1885, the antagonized Imperial government publicly stripped Siddiq Hasan Khan of his titles, salutes and rank, and reduced Shah Jahan Begam to the status of a figurehead sovereign.[9]

By intervening in the state's administration in this way, British officers were fulfilling the government's aim, first articulated by Lord Mayo in 1870, of ensuring that rulers did not abuse the power that had been granted to them by the Queen's Proclamation of 1858.[10]

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[6] Copland, *Princes*, 16.

[7] *Memoranda of Information regarding certain Native Chiefs. Volume IV. Central India.* in IOR, L/P&S/20/F76/4. The distinctions granted to Shah Jahan Begam were also mentioned in Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. I, 125, 217-218, 244-245.

[8] An extract of Siddiq Hasan Khan's pamphlet, *Diwan ul-Khutub al-Sanat al-Kamila*, published in Bhopal in 1879, was quoted in government files to prove his disloyalty: "Know ye that the true 'jihad' is to give away our lives and property in the cause of God, and it is the most virtuous of all deeds and the most mertorious of all acts, and it is the pinnacle of the edifice of Islam and one of the most firm institutions of the Chief of mankind." See IOR, CR, R/1/1/32. There is no mention, however, of his other works, including *Tarjuman-i-Wahhabiyyat*, which was intended to prove the loyalty of members of the Ahl-i-Hadith movement. See Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, 279.

[9] See extensive correspondence in IOR, CR, R/1/1/32; and IOR, CR, R/1/1/33.

[10] Copland, *Princes*, 18-20.

Griffin's example proves, however, that their manoeuvring was not intended to become public; though he was often blunt and discourteous to the Begam in private, he continued to show respect for her in public meetings, placing all blame for corruption and intrigue in the state on her husband.[11] But such a prolonged episode could not be kept private indefinitely. In a lengthy article in *The Times* on the 27th of December, 1886, sordid details regarding the Begam's disastrous second marriage and her fall from grace were revealed.[12] The Foreign Department was sent into a flurry of activity, issuing apologies and seeking retribution. Yet, in all of the correspondence surrounding this incident, the charges against Shah Jahan Begam were never actually contradicted. Instead, officers remarked on the "want of prudence and generosity" involved in publishing in an international newspaper the "fact" of a reigning princess having been "seduced by a clerk."[13] The system of paramountcy, essential to the maintenance of power by both the British and the Indian princes, demanded a constant show of public decorum and cooperation by the ruling classes.

Following her accession to the throne in July, 1901, Sultan Jahan Begam sought to perpetuate the Bhopali tradition by firmly declaring her loyalty to the British crown. First at her investiture ceremony and, shortly after, at the Coronation Durbar in Delhi, she proclaimed everlasting allegiance and submission to the King, not only for herself and her children, but also for every man and woman in her state and every Muslim in India.[14] Unlike her mother, she had no intention, however, of allowing local British officers to infiltrate her sovereignty by setting a budget and putting affairs in order, as was their plan.[15] After the death of her husband, Ahmad 'Ali Khan, in 1902, she retired the elderly ministers of her mother's government, many of whom were uneducated and corrupt, and centralized power in her own hands, introducing a comprehensive package of administrative reforms. Though her actions evidently surprised staff of the Central India Agency, the new AGG, C.S. Bayley, was convinced by a visit to Bhopal that the Begam did, in fact, have an "intelligent grasp" of the situation and should be given a fair chance to run the administration herself.[16] In view of Curzon's interventionist policy towards the princes, this independent action must have been

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[11] For Griffin's conflicting attitudes toward the Begam, see private dispatches in IOR, CR, R/1/1/35; and public speeches in Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, 115-129.
[12] "An Episode in Indian Government" in *The Times* (London), 27 Dec., 1886.
[13] Note of D. [Earl of Dufferin], 5 Feb., 1887, IOR, CR, R/1/1/55.
[14] See speeches in Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. II, 13-15, 87-88.
[15] See H.S. Barnes, FS, to C.S. Bayley, AGG, 22 Mar., 1902, NAI(ND), GOI, FD, Jan., 1903, Nos. 191-196.
[16] Bayley to Barnes, 17 Jun., 1902, *ibid.*

exceptional.[17] It led to the establishment of friendly relations between the Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal and the British government, which remained firm, at least publicly, until the final years of her reign. The public and private mechanics of this relationship, as it developed with regard to both Indian Muslim and princely politics between 1901 and 1930, will be examined in the sections that follow.

Early Muslim Agitation

Between 1907 and 1909, the Government of India sought to formulate a scheme of constitutional reforms, referred to as the Morley-Minto reforms, intended to increase Indian involvement in legislative councils. The question of communal representation was immediately raised by the All-India Muslim League, an organization which had been founded in 1906 under the leadership of certain Aligarh men, including Hakim Ajmal Khan and Muhammad 'Ali, to articulate the aspirations of Indian Muslims. It demanded a reserved number of Muslim seats in every elected body, reflecting both the numerical proportion of the community and its political importance in the area, to be filled by separate Muslim electorates. The Government of India's reform scheme, outlined in a dispatch in October, 1908, did not fulfil the League's full demand for representation, but it did accept the principle of separate electorates. The Secretary of State, however, refused the League even this, suggesting Muslim seats based on numerical proportion, for which both Hindus and Muslims could vote. League leaders reacted to this "betrayal" of their community by rousing a Muslim agitation in the first half of 1909 unlike none before. Muslims of all sects, classes, regions and shades of opinion joined the protest, delivering memorials to the government and holding mass meetings across India. Eventually, the government was forced to recognize at least some of the League's demands.[18]

The Begam of Bhopal's response to this disturbance, like that of other princes, was unequivocal. Despite the involvement of the Agha Khan, Amir 'Ali and various Aligarh leaders with whom she enjoyed both personal and professional relationships, she branded the movement as "mischievous and disloyal," upholding Bhopal's tradition of fidelity. Her speech given during Lord Minto's visit to the state in November, 1909, shortly after the passing of

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[17] During Lord Curzon's viceroyalty, from 1898 to 1905, the princes' sovereignty was systematically chipped away until as many as sixty-three states were under some form of temporary British control, while many others were under comprehensive restrictions. Copland, *Princes*, 20-21.

[18] Robinson, *Separatism*, 149-159.

the controversial Indian Councils Bill, is highly indicative of her early response to dissident movements in British India and, thus, will be quoted at length:

> It is difficult for us who live in Bhopal to realize that such a thing as disloyalty exists. England has won her way to greatness, not by the force of arms, but by her moral strength, and it is this moral strength which compels the admiration and fealty of every right-minded person. It was, indeed, well for India that she came under control of such a power- a control which has given to her people the inestimable gifts of peace, justice and liberty, and which has led to a period of prosperity and progress, the like of which had never before been dreamt of. It is beyond dispute that the vast majority of His Majesty's Indian subjects, and especially the Muhamadan section of them, gratefully acknowledge the manifold blessings that have accrued to them under British rule, the permanency of which they regard as the only guarantee of their welfare. The disloyalty of the few only serves to emphasize the loyalty of the many...[19]

Minto himself, in letters to Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India, confirmed that he was receiving overwhelming support from the Indian princes for the reforms. He noted that the Begam of Bhopal, in particular, whom he fondly referred to as the "little lady," had "most interesting" opinions and was "full of energy."[20] This incident suggests that, while the Viceroy was an affable gentleman who was popular with the princes, the Begam herself was rather shrewd. By identifying herself with the ruling classes, rather than democratic Muslims, she was able to stave off, at least for the moment, calls for self-government within her own territories.

Soon after the founding of the Morley-Minto Councils, the Hindu community turned its attention to launching a denominational university at Benares. Simultaneously, the Muslims of Aligarh revived earlier campaigns to raise the status of the Aligarh College to that of a university. Young Muslim leaders, like Muhammad 'Ali, claimed that higher education needed to be organized on a communal basis, in order to allow the Muslims to compete with the Hindus on "something like equitable terms" in the "vast process of political and social change" which was going on in the country.[21] The Muslim University campaign was, however, portrayed as being a purely educational movement, unconnected to the Muslim League, in order to gain the support of the government. This lack of affiliation meant that it also received the patronage of professed British loyalists, like Sultan Jahan Begam and her

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[19] Quoted in Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 52. Other princes were equally loyal in their response to sedition, banning liberal newspapers, outlawing local campaigns and issuing statements in favour of the government. The regent of Jodhpur, Pertab Singh, even went so far as to suggest that one method of curbing the protest might be "much chili, then hanging." Quoted in Copland, *Princes*, 30.

[20] Lord Minto to Lord Morley, 11 Nov., 1909, IOL, Morley Collection, MSS.Eur.D.573/22.

[21] Muhammad 'Ali's article in the *Comrade* (Calcutta), 19 Aug., 1911, quoted in Robinson, *Separatism*, 201. For more on the Muslim University movement in general, see Gail Minault and David Lelyveld. "The Campaign for a Muslim University," *Modern Asian Studies*, 8, 2 (1974), 145-189.

band of followers in Bhopal.

Fund-raising deputations for the new university began canvassing early in 1911. In Bhopal, the committee was organized by the Begam's second son, Colonel Obaidullah Khan, who collected substantial contributions from state subjects, including the women of the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club. Sultan Jahan herself addressed a gathering of elite women, encouraging them, not only to subscribe to the movement, but also to collect small donations from poor women in their neighbourhoods. Interestingly, her speech does not appear to have been significantly tailored for a female audience. She encouraged the women to collect as many subscriptions as the "sterner sex," but she did not offer any special justification for their involvement in a public movement, as was done by women such as Bi Amman and Begam Muhammad 'Ali during the Khilafat agitation.[22] As such, her speech closely resembled those given by Iranian women, when collecting donations to found a national bank in their country in 1906. Undoubtedly, this similarity can be attributed to the fact that Iranian women, in contrast to female Khilafat agitators, but like the ruling Begam, had already established a public role through participation in the constitutional agitation of 1905.[23]

In her speech, the Begam clearly placed her call for the advancement of the Muslim community within the imperial context, very much like other Muslim aristocrats, including the Agha Khan and the Raja of Mahmudabad, who were similarly reliant on the government for their exalted position. Not only did she quote the "sympathetic" words of the late Queen Victoria and Lord Curzon in favour of Muslim education, but she also credited the British government for having prepared Muslims to seek the "high aim" of a university through their generosity and support. Earlier sections of her speech confirm, however, that the Begam was also influenced by the religious ideas of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, as they emerged from the Walliyu'llahi tradition of religious reform. She emphasized, for instance, the need to produce "learned and true followers" of the Muslim religion from within an English-style institution of higher learning.[24] This assertion reflected ideas, as advanced by Sayyid Ahmad in *Tahzib ul-Akhlaq* and elsewhere, that an understanding of Islam could only be meaningful if the secular interests of the community were served, most likely through collaboration with the

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[22] For speeches by female Khilafat leaders, see Minault, "Purdah Politics," 253.

[23] See Mangol Bayat-Philipp. "Women and Revolution in Iran, 1905-1911" in Beck and Keddie, *Women in the Muslim World*, 299.

[24] "Speech delivered by Her Highness at a meeting held in connection with the Muslim University" in *Decennial Report*, 150-54.

British government. Muslims, as the recipients of the final revelation, were meant to prosper, not only in the next life, but also on earth.[25]

The combination of secular and religious influences in the above speech reflects Sultan Jahan Begam's identification with, what has been called, the 'Old Party.'[26] Her approach was entirely at odds with that of young new leaders, most notably Muhammad 'Ali, who argued that the Government of India was no longer prepared to look after the interests of the Muslim community. The disillusionment of these young radicals, often referred to as the 'Young Party,'[27] had been enhanced when the British refused assistance to Turkey during the Balkan wars, then rejected the Muslim University scheme in August, 1912. They decided that something needed to be done to protect the cause of Islam. Their first project was the Red Crescent Medical Mission to Turkey, led by Dr. M.A. Ansari, a politicized young physician from Delhi, late in 1912. Though it emerged out of the politics of the time, it reflected the strong religious identification that had grown up between Indian Muslims and their co-religionists in the Middle East since the fall of the Mughal emperor in 1857. Fostered by the Iranian-born exile, Jamaluddin al-Afghani, these pan-Islamic sentiments had resulted, not only in the Ottoman Sultan's name being read in certain Indian mosques on Fridays, but also in increased Indian sympathy for Turkey during wars with Russia and Greece in the late nineteenth century.[28]

Like fund-raising drives during earlier Turkish wars, the Medical Mission was portrayed as being a purely religious undertaking. As a result, it, like the Muslim University movement, received the support of both the government and more conservative Muslim leaders. Sultan Jahan Begam herself organized a relief fund within her own territories, which received substantial donations from both men and women, many of whom had never before shown an interest in public movements.[29] Nevertheless, the Muslim University movement and the Red Crescent Medical Mission to Turkey actually represented the loss of political

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[25] Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, 322.

[26] The terms 'Young Party' and 'Old Party' were often used by contemporary government officials to interpret the political scene. They have been adopted by Robinson and other scholars, as they will be in this discourse, for convenience. Comprehensive definitions of a secular nature can be found in Robinson, *Separatism*, 176-194. A religious component has been added in later works, notably Francis Robinson. "Islam and Muslim Separatism" in D. Taylor and M. Yapp, eds. *Political Identity in South Asia*. London: Curzon Press, 1979, 78-112.

[27] See fn. 26.

[28] Gail Minault. *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982, 5-6.

[29] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 235-236.

credibility by older-style politicians, like the Begam, who advocated cooperation with the government. 'Young Party' Muslim leaders, including the 'Ali brothers, Dr. Ansari and even her own son, Hamidullah, were in the ascendancy. By 1916, they would have wrested positions of authority within the community away from the old guard, bringing to the forefront their confrontational style of politics. Yet, as will be seen in the following section, the Begam was able to maintain her integrity in the growing political turbulence of the mid to late 1910s through a careful maneouvering of both the government and the new leaders.

The Balkan Wars and Early World War I: The Start of Turbulence

Activities surrounding the Balkan Wars signalled the increased involvement by Muslim women in national and local political activities. When the Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Ka'aba, a league for the protection of Muslim holy places, was founded in 1913 by the 'Ali brothers and their religious guide, Maulana 'Abdul Bari of Firangi Mahal, it sought to enrol every Muslim in India, including men, women and children. Women's meetings were held in Delhi and Lucknow for the relatives of male leaders and the female disciples of 'Abdul Bari, including Begam Khwaja 'Abdul Majid, an associate of the Begam of Bhopal, at which money and jewellery were collected for the cause of Islam. The prominent female figures in this movement, Bi Amman, mother of the 'Ali brothers, and Begam Ansari, wife of Dr. Ansari, justified women's participation on the basis that it was a strictly religious organization. They also gained the approval of orthodox Muslim society for their actions by emphasizing their familial relations and encouraging women to donate their personal wealth in the traditional form of gold ornaments.[30]

In this period, Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal also became increasingly outspoken on issues of all-India politics. When the First World War broke out in September, 1914, she promptly responded, along with the Nizam of Hyderabad and other Muslim princes, to the Viceroy's request to issue proclamations to the Muslim community in favour of the British war effort, even though it meant forsaking her religious brethren in Turkey. To both holy men and lay members of her community, the Begam defended her allegiance to the British over the faltering Turkish Sultan on the basis of the Islamic religion, asserting that Muslims had a duty, according to the Qur'an, to support a government that offered "unprecedented peace and

[30] Minault, "Purdah Politics," 249-250.

comfort" and "full religious liberty" over one that was perpetrating atrocities on innocent women and children and destroying invaluable libraries and historical monuments. She advised her co-religionists to remain firm in their loyalty to the British, even if the Sultan raised "the cry of Islam."[31] This line of argument contrasted with that of the Nizam, who defended his own loyalty to the British on the basis that the war was of a political nature and, therefore, did not constitute *jihad*, or an Islamic holy war of conquest.[32]

In making the above declaration, Sultan Jahan Begam presented herself as a leader of the Indian Muslims, very much as the Maharajas of Patiala and Nabha were presenting themselves as leaders of the Sikhs in Punjab. A comparison of Bhopal and the Punjab states shows, however, that the motivations of the princes for seeking leadership status were somewhat different. According to Barbara Ramusack, the Punjabi princes, confident in the dominance of their community within their states, sought this acknowledgement, not only for the respect it garnered them with the British, but also for the influence they gained with nationalist groups both within and without their states.[33] The Begam of Bhopal, belonging to a small minority community within her state, would not have fostered such positive contact with the nationalists. Like other rulers in her position, including the Nizam of Hyderabad, she conversely hoped to use the status attached to communal leadership as an antidote to the threat of democratic movements- and, ultimately, Hindu control- in Bhopal.[34]

Though the government recognized that the sympathies of the Begam and other Bhopalis lay with the Turks, they were quick to seek her advice, along with that of the Nawab of Rampur and other 'loyal' Muslims, on handling matters of their community throughout the war.[35] Eager for recognition of her status as a national Muslim leader, the Begam was more than willing to comply. Yet she would not become a stooge of the government, alienating herself from the group over which she sought influence. Her pragmatism is evident in suggestions made during several conversations with W.S. Davis, Political Agent in Bhopal,

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[31] "Translation of Her Highness the Begum's address to her people, Bhopal, 5 November, 1914," *ibid.* The address was also reprinted by W.S. Davis, then PA, in his memoirs, IOL, Davis Collection, Photo.Eur.291. For arguments directed specifically at the Bhopali *'ulama*, see Davis, PA, to O.V. Bosanquet, AGG, 2 Nov., 1914, NAI(ND), GOI, F&P, Oct., 1916, Nos. 13-34.

[32] Ramusack, *Princes*, 53.

[33] See Ramusack, "Maharajas and Gurdwaras," 170-204.

[34] For a discussion of similar strategies undertaken in Hyderabad, Mysore and Travancore, see Robin Jeffrey. "Introduction" to Jeffrey, *People, Princes and Paramount Power*, 23-24.

[35] For Britain's wartime policy towards Indian Muslims, see P.G. Robb. *The Evolution of British Policy Towards Indian Politics 1880-1920: Essays on Colonial Attitudes, Imperial Strategies, and Bihar*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1992, 266-268.

reported to O.V. Bosanquet, AGG in Central India, in November, 1914. She recommended the suppression, not only of "suspicious" newspapers, like the *Pioneer*, but also of speeches by government sycophants , like Zulfiqar 'Ali Khan, that abused the Sultan of Turkey. Similarly, she recognized the need to counter the propaganda of "disaffected" Muslim leaders by engaging "trustworthy Maulvis" to give regular lectures in Muslim colleges and schools. Yet she disputed that Aligarh College should be closed, claiming that, despite the influence of ardent pan-Islamists, like Muhammad 'Ali and his party, the majority of the students and nearly all of their fathers were, at least for the moment, "loyal enough."[36] The validity of her position was confirmed when several radical Muslim organizations connected with Aligarh, including the Muslim League, passed resolutions advocating loyalty within days of Turkey having joined the war.[37] The Political Secretary in Delhi noted that the Begam was indeed a "shrewd observer."[38]

As the war progressed, the assistance of the Begam of Bhopal and other Muslim princes was enlisted on an even more frequent basis when dealing with matters of the Muslim community. Diverse incidents, ranging from the emergence of movements for Arab independence in 1916 to a mass Muslim meeting in Calcutta in 1918 and the war with Afghanistan in 1919, resulted in Sultan Jahan Begam being requested by the British government, not only to put forward her views, but also to direct the sentiments of Indian Muslims in favour of the British position.[39] The government's consultatory policy can be attributed to the fact that, upon being appointed Viceroy in 1916, Lord Chelmsford had been urged by King George V to visit the native rulers regularly, so that he may gain the benefit of their experience and advice.[40] Evidently, the British in India had realized, as they had after the Mutiny, that the princes could act as vital intermediaries between the Raj and local people. The Begam did not disappoint them. She issued a plethora of notifications and formal announcements stating that it was "unnecessary and undesirable" for Bhopalis, Hindu or Muslim, to protest against British policy- by showing support for Arab independence, attending religious meetings, or professing allegiance to the Amir of Afghanistan- as long as

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[36] Davis to Bosanquet, 7 Nov., 1914, NAI(ND), GOI, F&P, Oct., 1916, Nos. 13-34.
[37] Robinson, *Separatism*, 240.
[38] Comment of J.B. Wood, PS, 7 Nov., 1914, NAI(ND), GOI, F&P, Jan, 1915, No. 1.
[39] See, for example, Telegram from Chamberlain to Chelmsford, 30 Jun., 1916; and *Kharita* from the Viceroy to the Ruling Chiefs, 9 May, 1919, IOL, Chelmsford Collection, MSS.Eur.E.264/22.
[40] Copland, *Princes*, 33.

their religion was thoroughly protected by the British government.[41]

When offering advice to the government, Sultan Jahan continued to defend Aligarh against claims of disloyalty. She did not, however, remain so protective of other Muslim institutions with which she was associated. In an attempt to prove her fidelity to the British, she warned the government, early in the war, to keep a close watch on the Firangi Mahal at Lucknow and the Islamia College at Deoband for pan-Islamic propaganda.[42] Both of these institutions not only received funding from Bhopal, but also provided graduates for employment in state institutions. The *'ulama* of Deoband were particularly closely connected with the state, since they supplied teachers and examiners for the Madrasa Ahmedia, a theological institution in Bhopal city, which was affiliated to the seminary at Deoband.[43] By cautioning the government about these institutions, the Begam assisted the British in their policy of isolating radical Muslim politicians from the rest of their community, just as the Nawab of Rampur did when he issued orders for Muhammad 'Ali to be interned in 1915.[44] As a result, British intelligence officers were, at first, extremely grateful to the Begam, noting that it was most convenient that she was "in a position to know many secrets of the Moslem underworld."[45] As the fears of a "Mohamedan conspiracy" grew, however, the Begam's contact with institutions and individuals of dubious political conviction began to be questioned. More often than not, this was a result of her youngest son's political activities.

Government enquiries into the affairs of Nawabzada Hamidullah Khan began shortly after the start of the war, while he was still a student at Aligarh College. Information had been received by top British officials in the United Provinces that he had become "very intimate" with Muhammad 'Ali and Shaukat 'Ali, donating substantial sums to fund their seditious activities and even starting a subscription among Aligarh students to raise the amount of the confiscated security of their newspaper, the *Comrade*. Subsequent accounts of the period by Hamidullah Khan's fellow students, notably Choudhry Khaliquzzam, suggest that he was, in fact, doing just that.[46] UP officers expressed their fear that the 'Ali brothers

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[41] See, for example, Translation of Notification dated 11 Sept., 1918, published in *Jarida*, the Bhopal Gazette, 12 Sept., 1918, in NAI(ND), GOI, F&P, Oct., 1918, No. 20 Secret; and "Proclamation" of the Begam of Bhopal, IOL, Chelmsford Collection, MSS.Eur.E.264/22.

[42] Bosanquet to Wood, 4 Nov., 1914, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1125.

[43] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 14. In her history of the madrasa at Deoband, Metcalf also mentions connections between the institution and Bhopal state. See *Islamic Revival*, 87, 96.

[44] See Robb, *Evolution*, 268-269.

[45] Note of C.R. Cleveland, Dir., CID, 9 Nov., 1914, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1125.

[46] See Choudhry Khaliquzzam. *Pathway to Pakistan*. Lahore: Ferozson's Ltd., 1961, 16-17, 39-40.

were trying to use the impressionable young prince as a "tool" to enlist the aid and approval of his revered mother. They recognized that the plot would have serious ramifications on the attitude of the Muslim community towards the government if it was perceived to have been at all successful.[47]

When officials in the Foreign and Political Department received this information, they expressed their concern that the Begam of Bhopal had been "deceived" by her favourite son. She had told the Political Secretary, Sir John Wood, in July of the previous year that, far from being corrupted by Aligarh, her dear son had "raised the tone of the college and strengthened the loyalty of his fellow students." This no longer seemed likely. It was suggested, however, in recognition of Bhopal's consistent loyalty, that the boy might be on a "missionary enterprise" to convince the "evil-doers" to give up their treacherous activities. Wood noted that the Begam herself had recently offered to invite Muhammad 'Ali to Bhopal in an attempt to "reason with him and point out the error of his ways."[48] But then, perhaps, this, too, was an excuse. As distinctions between 'religious' and 'political' became increasingly clouded, the purpose of both mother and son remaining in contact with anti-British agitators became far from clear to British officers. Local officers in Central India were asked to approach Sultan Jahan Begam for an explanation.

The Begam was very upset by the accusations, as she had specifically warned the Nawabzada against getting involved in politics or giving Muhammad 'Ali any financial assistance. Hamidullah himself vehemently denied having contributed to the political activities of the 'Ali brothers, though he admitted to having seen them quite regularly. Not only had Muhammad 'Ali been his tutor in Bhopal before joining the Baroda state service, but he had also met him often in Aligarh, as he was an Old Boy and a Trustee. His defense was strengthened by Bosanquet, the AGG, who claimed that Hamidullah may be "spoilt" and "out of hand," but he was essentially "loyal at heart." He asserted that it was "unthinkable" that the 'Ali brothers would ever receive the patronage of the Bhopal durbar, as the Begam had always proved herself to be completely devoted to the British Crown.[49] Intelligence officers noted privately that they thought Bosanquet was being rather optimistic about the situation

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[47] R. Burn, CS to the Govt of UP, to H. Wheeler, Sec. to GOI in the Home Dept, 14 Nov., 1914, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1124.

[48] Note by Wood, 19 Nov., 1914, *ibid.* He refers to the letter from Davis to Bosanquet, 7 Nov., 1914, in NAI(ND), GOI, F&P, Oct., 1916, Nos. 13-34.

[49] Bosanquet to Wood, 9 Dec., 1914, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1124.

in Bhopal, especially since they had just received documentation of some literary work which Muhammad 'Ali had recently completed for the durbar.[50] But, for the moment, the issue was dropped. In future, Bosanquet's unfailing defense of the often misleading activities of both the Begam and her son would be even more crucial in keeping the durbar out of trouble. For the next two years, however, Hamidullah Khan and other politically active Bhopalis were able to remain out of the probing gaze of government officials.

The Later Years of World War I: More Fervent Muslim Political Activities

Muslim political activities, particularly by 'Young Party' leaders, became increasingly fervent in the latter years of the war. In December, 1916, the Congress and the Muslim League came to an agreement, which stated that Muslims would accept under-representation in Muslim-majority areas in return for Congress approval of separate electorates. This compromise, commonly known as the Lucknow Pact, enabled Hindu and Muslim leaders to begin working together to wrest power from the British. Soon after, the Government of India interned prominent leaders of all communities, including Annie Besant and the 'Ali brothers, for their persistent expression of pan-Islamic and nationalist sympathies. Their incarceration coincided with the growth of a more explicit interest in politics by other groups of Muslim society, notably women and the *'ulama*.[51] At the grand age of sixty-seven, Bi Amman emerged as a preeminent figure on the national scene, agitating for the release of both her sons and Mrs. Besant. She was a conspicuous figure at the 1917 annual conference of the Muslim League, speaking, from behind her veil, on behalf of her jailed son, Muhammad 'Ali. She also attended the Congress session, along with the recently freed Mrs. Besant and the leading Congresswoman and poet, Sarojini Naidu, an act which symbolized, not only communal harmony, but also the increased visibility of Indian women in public life.[52] Leading British officers, particularly Sir Harcourt Butler, recognized the extent of this new political challenge; he warned Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, "No Government in the East can control a combination of priests and women."[53]

More radical Muslim movements were also being initiated in connection with the war in Turkey. One such plot, referred to as the Silk Letters Conspiracy, involved raising the

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[50] Note by Cleveland, Dir., CID, 18 Dec.14, *ibid.*

[51] For the political emergence of *'ulama* from Deoband and Firangi Mahal, see Minault, *Khilafat*, 25-38.

[52] Minault, "Purdah Politics," 252.

[53] Harcourt Butler to Chelmsford, 20 Apr., 1919, IOL, Chelmsford Collection, MSS.Eur.E.264/22.

tribes on the North-West Frontier, with Turkish and German assistance, to overthrow the British in India. It was perpetrated by eminent 'Young Party' leaders such as Abul Kalam Azad, Hasrat Mohani and, perhaps, Dr. Ansari and the 'Ali brothers, as well as leading members of the *'ulama*, including Mahmud ul-Hasan of Deoband and Obeidullah Sindhi, formerly of Deoband.[54] When an associated Maulvi of Saharanpur, Khalil Ahmad, received a grand reception in Bhopal shortly before his arrest in September, 1916, high officials of the state were, similarly, implicated in the plot. Major 'Abdus Samad Khan, the Begam's Military Secretary, was treated with especial suspicion, as he was thought to have provided the rebellious Maulvi, to whom he was a disciple, with accommodation and introduced him to the ruling Begam. Intelligence officers feared that the Bhopali elite were joining the conspirators.[55]

Having studied at Deoband, many Bhopali officers were, in fact, in close contact with the above Maulvis, including Khalil Ahmad and Mahmud ul-Hasan. Dr. Ansari, an increasingly frequent visitor to the state, had even provided the latter with funds to remain abroad and out of British hands. Nevertheless, Bosanquet, the AGG, was sceptical about the possibility of any conspiracy, insisting that the Bhopal officers were "faithful servants" of the government.[56] British officials from outside Central India were not so sure, particularly after they realized that Sultan Jahan Begam was the primary patron of Nazarat ul-Ma'arif ul-Qur'ania, the school which Obeidullah Sindhi had founded in Delhi after having been asked to leave Deoband.[57] C.R. Cleveland of the CID, reported that Obeidullah was known to have been a "dangerous person" when he had started the institution, yet the Begam had still provided him with the necessary subscription. What, he asked, could have led the Begam to foster such a "dangerous and suspicious enterprise?" Was someone influencing her to give such valuable assistance to these "enemies of the British Government?"[58]

Suspicions were deepened when detained conspirators named Qazi Mohiuddin Khan, a leading religious and administrative figure in Bhopal, as a dedicated follower and patron of

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[54] For a discussion of the Silk Letters Conspiracy, see Robinson, *Separatism*, 280n.8. The plot received its name from the bales of silk upon which conspirators in India and Afghanistan wrote their letters.
[55] Cleveland to Wood, 26 Sept., 1916, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1154.
[56] Bosanquet to Wood, 7 Oct., 1916 and 27 Oct., 1916, *ibid.*
[57] Obeidullah Sindhi had been central to the curriculum dispute at Deoband, which had split the institution in 1913. He had differed with Maulana Shibli over the inclusion of Arabic history in the course. Following his departure from the school, he proceeded to attack the institution from the outside, organizing an agitation against the management. For his activities, he was branded a *kafir* by the remaining Deoband *'ulama*. Minault, *Khilafat*, 29.
[58] Cleveland to Bosanquet, 26 Oct., 1916, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1154.

Maulvi Mahmud ul-Hasan. Shortly after, it was discovered by officers in the United Provinces that Sultan Jahan herself had recently arranged a monthly allowance for the Maulvi's family. The Lieutenant Governor, Sir James Meston, was quick to warn the Foreign and Political Department of this development by way of one of his lesser officers, who commented:

> As the family are already well off through the gifts of other well-wishers, this grant was not at all necessary and it seems a curious thing for Her Highness to go out of her way to make it. It is all however in accordance with what we hear about the dominance of the young party in Bhopal at present... You may wish to impress upon the Foreign Department the extent to which the Begam is now being influenced by evil advisers. A little firmness now appears necessary to bring her back to the straight path and to get her to realize that she is playing with fire. She would never be consciously disloyal; but she has been always rather prone to assist people whose animosity to the British Government is so notorious that it leaves her actions open to considerable misconceptions.[59]

Top officials responded with the view that it was Hamidullah's influence that was leading her astray, as he was probably sympathetic to the conspiracy.[60] Bhopal's loyalty was under fire.

Similar charges had earlier been levelled at the Gaikwad of Baroda when it had been discovered that extreme Hindu nationalists, including Aurobindo Ghose and K.G. Deshpande, were producing revolutionary literature within the state, unimpeded by the durbar. The situation had only been diffused when the Gaikwad had submitted to British demands, forcing the resignation of the extremists from state service and the closure of their press. In disgrace, he had handed the Baroda administration over to a *diwan* and left for Europe, where he had spent a good portion of the rest of his reign.[61] The conflict in Bhopal had a significantly different resolution. Primarily, this was due to the actions of individual British officers, rather than a change in imperial policy. Bosanquet, unlike the resident in Baroda, leaped to the defence of the state, arguing, in two long letters to Wood, that there was no ground for the claim that Hamidullah was supportive of the conspiracy, nor that Bhopal was under the influence of the "young party." He questioned, furthermore, who the Begam's "evil advisors" were, noting that the officers under suspicion- 'Abdur Rahman Bijnori, Hamidullah's contemporary from Aligarh, Abru Begam, Maulana Azad's sister, and Major 'Abdus Samad, the Military Secretary- had no concrete charges against them. As for Hamidullah, was it not to be expected that the Begam would want him as one of her secretaries, being that he was, not only her youngest and favourite son, but also a conscientious administrator with a good

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[59] Burn to Cleveland, 4 Nov., 1916, *ibid.*
[60] R.E. Holland, DPS, to Wood, 10 Nov., 1916, *ibid.*
[61] David Hardiman. "Baroda: The Structure of a 'Progressive' State" in Jeffrey, *People, Princes, and Paramount Power*, 123-125.

degree from Aligarh?

With regard to Sultan Jahan Begam's support for Obeidullah Sindhi's institution in Delhi, Bosanquet argued that sufficient explanation could be found in the fact that it had been advertised originally as a "school of Islamic theology, divorced from politics and imbued with loyalty to the British crown."[62] Indeed, the Nazarat al-Ma'arif al-Qur'ania had begun as a strictly apolitical venture, intending to fulfil the religious needs of Indian Muslims, particularly those of a Westernized background. As such, it had received the patronage, not only of the Begam of Bhopal, but also the Nawab of Rampur and various Muslim traders from Bombay and Karachi. It was only when Obeidullah Sindhi had later been introduced by Dr. Ansari to Maulana Azad and Muhammad 'Ali that it had developed into a forum for informal political discussion.[63] And, as Bosanquet pointed out, the Begam could not be held accountable for Obeidullah or any other Maulvi later turning out to be a rogue.[64] Higher officials in the Foreign and Political Department responded with annoyance to Bosanquet's "long and argumentative" letters, but they were essentially satisfied with his defence of the state and its ruler.[65] The inquiry into Bhopal's participation in the 'Muhammadan Conspiracy' was abandoned.

The Muslim University and the Sultania College Scheme: More Trouble for Hamidullah:

The Muslim University Scheme, as it had been conceived of before 1912, was a project that had received the patronage of nearly all Muslims, regardless of their political affiliations. When it was rejected by the government in August, 1912, however, opinion divided on the means to go forward. Whereas older-style politicians were prepared to accept the terms of the government, 'Young Party' men were resolute on preserving the original plan. They were particularly adamant about maintaining a system of affiliation, as this point was central to their plans for rejuvenating the whole Muslim community. In subsequent years, they went to great lengths to ensure that a compromise was not reached with either the 'Old Party' or the government. Though they were initially successful in this feat, they were still no further ahead. The Hindus had come to an agreement with the government over Benares Hindu University, but the Muslims remained without a university.

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[62] Bosanquet to Wood, 13 Nov., 1916; and Bosanquet to Wood, 19 Nov., 1916, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1154.
[63] See Minault, *Khilafat*, 28-30.
[64] Bosanquet to Cleveland, 6 Nov., 1916, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1154.
[65] Note by Wood, 15 Nov., 1916, *ibid.*

When the 'Ali brothers and other members of the 'Young Party' were interned during the First World War, 'Old Party' politicians used the opportunity to seek conciliation with the government over a Muslim University. They were aided in this process by the defection of the Raja of Mahmudabad, and with him, Dr. Ansari, to their side in 1916, after Meston, the Lieutenant-Governor of UP, threatened to take away the Raja's taluqdari *sanad*, or proprietary rights, if he did not prove himself to be more acquiescent to the government. In this way, the final opposition on the Fund's central committee was removed and an agreement was reached. The 'Ali brothers, having emerged from detention, were determined to revenge their disgrace. In hopes of discrediting 'Old Party' plans for a Muslim University, they initiated a scheme to found a new arts college on the model of Aligarh, which would serve those students, who, for whatever reason, were refused entrance to the above institution. Though a lack of accommodation was claimed to be one of the main restrictions, the focus of the project was on economic limitations. Their intention was to draw existing support for the old project to their new enterprise [66]

Eager to secure backing from respected members of the Muslim community, 'Young Party' leaders again turned to Nawabzada Hamidullah Khan for his support. Though his political activities had been severely curtailed by his mother, his involvement in an educational enterprise would not be proscribed. He was portrayed as a leading figure in the movement, inextricably linking Bhopal to the scheme. A pamphlet on the scheme, having been printed in the state, was endorsed, not only by Hamidullah, but also by prominent officers in Bhopal's Education Department, including Anwarul Haq and 'Abdur Rahman Bijnori. It was also signed by principal 'Young Party' members from outside the state, most notably, Hakim Ajmal Khan. Sultan Jahan Begam herself even became involved in the project, when it was decided to recognize her "uncommon generosity" to Muslim education by imparting her name to the new institution.[67] Though 'Sultania College' never came into being, the Begam's loyal name was bound to one of the 'Ali brothers' so-called "hookah fantasies."[68]

The influence of Bhopal, and the Begam's innate practicality, was also evident in the outline of the scheme. Though the 'Ali brothers actually intended the new institution to replace Aligarh, it appeared, in the pamphlet, as a legitimate offshoot of the parent

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[66] For background to the Sultania College scheme, see Robinson, *Separatism*, 218-219.
[67] *Scheme for a New College for Poor Classes of Mussalmans*. Bhopal: Sultania Press, 1917, 4.
[68] Robinson, *Separatism*, 178.

organization. As the authors claimed:

> ...the time has come when the *alumni* of the Aligarh College should discharge their moral duty towards their *alma mater*, by transplanting in fresh soil shoots of the mighty tree of which the seed was sown at Aligarh by the loving hands of the late Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, and which has been watered with the life blood of the noble band of his successors and the greatest intellects of the community. Only thus can the Aligarh boys pass on to the coming generations the benefits which they owe to the labours of those great men who lived and wrought for the future.

It was asserted, furthermore, that, in order to avoid "jealousy and unhealthy rivalry" between the two institutions, the new school ought to be established at Dehra Dun, a site which, not only boasted a pleasant climate, but was also free from "all kinds of political influences and communal tensions."[69] Having been described in such benign terms, the Sultania Scheme, which was essentially 'Young Party' political manoeuvring, received the approval of the state, but did not raise the suspicion of local British officers.

Further activities surrounding the Muslim University Scheme did, however, bring Bhopal back into the view of government. In April, 1917, Hamidullah spoke at meetings of the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam in Lahore and the Muslim University Committee in Aligarh on the educational problems facing the Muslim community. According to sources from within the state, Hamidullah was attempting on these occasions to breach the gap between opposing factions of the community on the matter of accepting the government's conditions for the Muslim University.[70] In order to emphasize this purpose and avoid any misconceptions, Sultan Jahan Begam sent copies of both speeches to Davis, the Political Agent in Sehore. He issued an amiable reply, crediting the Nawabzada for his progressive approach, particularly to the education of women.[71] Nonetheless, he was suspicious about the young prince's intent. In August of the same year, he drew Bosanquet's attention to an announcement in *Oudh Akhbar*, which stated that Hamidullah was going to Simla to interview the Education Member as part of a Muslim University deputation that included such notorious "extremists" as the Raja of Mahmudabad, Dr. Ansari and 'Abdur Rahman Bijnori. Though he recognized that Hamidullah could hardly be "hauled over the coals" for associating with fellow Aligarh trustees, he suggested that he be alerted to the "danger" of fraternizing, not only with this group, but also the "pernicious gang," including Bijnori, 'Abdus Samad and 'Abdur Rahman

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[69] *Scheme for a New College*, 2, 4.

[70] Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam. *Iftikhar ul-Mulk*, 31. This short sketch of Hamidullah's life is contained in the private collection of Princess Abida Sultaan in Karachi. Though it contains no publication details, it appears to have been printed in Bhopal in the late 1920s.

[71] Davis to Sultan Jahan Begam, 15 May, 1917, NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 152, 1917.

Siddiqi, that was gaining influence in Bhopal.[72]

Bosanquet forwarded the letter to Wood with the disclaimer that the genteel Davis, having been offended by Hamidullah's "offhand and bad" manners, was "apt to write in extremes," taking a "pessimistic" view of anything that the young prince did. This explanation seems fairly plausible, considering that Hamidullah was later severely reprimanded for affronting an AGG by receiving him in shirt sleeves on a tennis court.[73] Bosanquet further defended him by noting that he was unaware of any current political activities by the named men, other than their involvement in the Muslim University Scheme, an educational interest that he was sure was a good thing. He suggested that, should the Viceroy meet Hamidullah in Simla, he would be better off congratulating him on his good administrative work in Bhopal, than lecturing him on his companions.[74] Davis, unsatisfied with the reaction of his direct superior, wrote directly to officers in Simla, appealing to them to stop any of the Nawabzada's extremist advisors from accompanying him on a visit to the Viceroy.[75] Higher officers in the Foreign and Intelligence Departments were not, however, inclined to follow up his inimical comments. Like other Indian princes, Sultan Jahan Begam and her three sons had continued to contribute invaluable assistance to the British war effort in the form of generous cash donations, foodstuff, arms, ships, airplanes, boats, horses and, of course, troops.[76] As was seen above, she also furnished indispensable information and support to the British government on matters affecting the Muslim community in India, including Turkish involvement in the war, the Arab revolt and the Afghan war. The Begam had made sure that the British could not afford to offend her.

The Emergence of the Princes onto the National Scene

The First World War had important consequences, not only for the Muslim community, but also for the princes of India. Before this time, they had had little contact either with each other or with movements in British India. But activities in connection with

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[72] Davis to Bosanquet, 15 Aug., 1917, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1159.
[73] See correspondence in IOR, CR, R/1/1/1943.
[74] Bosanquet to Wood, 20 Aug., 1917, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1159.
[75] Davis to Maffrey, 19 Aug., 1917, *ibid.*
[76] There are innumerable files in NAI(ND), GOI, F&P, documenting the generous contributions of the Begam and her sons to the war effort. See, for example, May, 1915, Nos. 909-960 on the Hospital Ship, 'Loyalty;' Feb., 1917, Nos. 319-320 on Nawab Nasrullah Khan's Motor Ambulance Launches; Apr., 1918, Nos. 350-357 on Bhopal's armoured airplane; and Aug., 1918, nos. 204-208 and Jun., 1920, Nos. 405-415 on the Begam's large cash donations. For the active response of princes in general to the First World War, see Ramusack, *Princes*, 38-40.

the war effort significantly eroded their political isolation. As was seen above, princely rulers, like the Begam of Bhopal, gained influence throughout India when they were asked to contribute to war projects or to arbitrate between the government and their religious community. When they were invited to imperial meetings of a political nature, like the Delhi War Conference in 1918, their sphere of activity widened still further. Insular feudal leaders were brought together with prominent British Indian politicians and top government officials to discuss momentous political questions concerning India and the empire. The princes were moving, as Barbara Ramusack has rightly pointed out, from the "realm of pageantry to that of political negotiation."[77]

Though Lord Minto had considered founding a princely advisory council as early as 1908, the first concrete effort to draw the princes into a closer association with the Government of India was made in 1913, when Lord Hardinge invited certain rulers to Delhi to discuss the problem of the education of princely sons. Dissension had arisen between British officials and the princes over whether heir-apparents should be educated by native officers within their state, where they could learn local customs, or in boarding schools, like the Mayo College at Ajmer and the Daly College in Indore, which were modeled on English public schools. Neither option was perfect. While training within the state often led the prince to be over-indulged by intriguing officers, education at one of the colleges usually resulted in him knowing more about cricket and polo than the traditions of his state or religion. The Begam of Bhopal had joined this educational debate as early as 1908, expressing her support at a meeting of the Council of the Daly College in Indore for a Chiefs' University that would provide instruction in both arts and sciences to the Masters' level.[78] By continuing to promote this plan, both at the meeting in 1913 and a subsequent conference in 1914, she once again came to the fore on the national scene.[79]

Though no real decisions were made at the initial conference, it was agreed at the second gathering in March, 1914 that a Higher Chiefs' College should be founded at Delhi,

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[77] Ramusack, *Princes*, 42.

[78] Sultan Jahan Begam. *The Higher Education of Indian Chiefs*. Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, 1908. Her proposal led to heated debate. See "Education for the Indian Nobility" in the *Pioneer* (Allahabad), 24 Dec., 1908; "Note by Mr. C.W. Waddington"; and note by L.W. Reynolds, 25 Apr., 1910, in NAI(ND), GOI, FD, Jun., 1910, No. 64-65. For her response, see Sultan Jahan Begam. *The Higher Education of Indian Chiefs- II*. Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1909.

[79] See Sultan Jahan Begam. *Higher Education of the Sons of Indian Chiefs and Nobles*. [English translation of Her Highness the Begam's speech at the Conference of Ruling Chiefs and Political Officers at Delhi, March, 1913]. Bhopal: Qudsia Press, 1913, 1-6.

essentially along the lines delineated by the Begam. The institution never came into being, however, as certain princes refused to agree to a scheme which would weaken local ties and encourage contact with 'lesser' families from British India. The financial depletion of the princes after World War I sealed the plan's fate. The episode is, nevertheless, significant, as it furnishes a picture of Sultan Jahan Begam's real priorities. Though she was most often hailed for her uplift of less-privileged segments of Muslim society, particularly women, she was, in fact, just as dedicated, if not more so, to the preservation of feudal elites, through the provision of higher education. Gender and even religious identities were side-lined in preference of class conservation. At a more general historical level, the conferences were important, because they inspired the ruling princes to demand more of a voice in imperial affairs, a call that resulted in the creation of an established forum for consultation, as well as the inclusion of princely representatives in the Paris Peace Conference and other international symposiums.[80]

The Chiefs' Conferences and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, 1916-1919

When Lord Chelmsford succeeded Hardinge as Viceroy in 1916, he decided to follow the advice of various prominent princes, as well as his political officials, and hold a more formal conference to discuss general matters affecting the princes. The agenda proposed to cover several fairly inoffensive topics, including the form of investiture ceremonies, the mode of minority administrations and the training of minor princes, as well as the earlier subject of a Higher Chiefs' College. It did not include any issue that was likely to cause a major dispute, particularly if it was related to the on-going war effort. Though British officers were glad to confer with their princely allies, they had no wish to create another political furore. Despite the limited nature of the conference, many leading princes, including the Maharajas of Bikaner and Gwalior and the Begam of Bhopal, eagerly accepted their invitations to the gathering, even meeting beforehand to consider the agenda, draft resolutions and appoint speakers.[81]

Undoubtedly to the Begam's consternation, the proceedings of the conference were in English, a language with which she was not overly comfortable. Nevertheless, she played an active role, advancing many controversial opinions, which brought her into conflict, not only with her fellow princes, but also with her own historical writings. When discussing the

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[80] Ramusack, *Princes*, 65-66.
[81] *Ibid.*, 67.

form of minority administrations, for instance, she opposed both Bikaner and the Rao of Cutch by asserting that the wife of a previous ruler should only be made regent in "very exceptional cases." Denying her earlier assertion that women's innate qualities actually made them better administrators,(see chapter I) she argued that the difficulties arising from the purdah system, as well as the lack of education received by Indian women, made it undesirable to put women in a position of power. Why had she modified her stance in a public forum? The latter half of her speech gives a clue to the apparent change. She maintained that female regents were likely to encourage intrigue and conspiracies in a state, since, as the widow of the late prince, they were unlikely to belong to the ruling family.[82] Her essential aim in excluding women from the role of regent was, thus, to conserve the existing hierarchy of command, which was integral to maintaining her own position as a member of the feudal elite. As conferring rights on women jeopardized the stability of the ruling class, the Begam was very firmly in opposition. That was practical politics.

Sultan Jahan Begam's desire to protect the privileged status of the princes similarly led her to enter the dispute that emerged over the matter of investiture ceremonies. In suggesting this item for the agenda, British officials had intended simply to elicit from the princes any minor grievances, so that they could be settled, as much as possible, before they escalated. The introductory comments of the Political Department on the topic immediately raised the ire of the princes, however, by asserting that, firstly, every succession required the "approval and sanction" of the Government of India, and, secondly, that such consent had to be formally announced at an installation durbar by a representative of the British government.[83] The Begam of Bhopal was part of this angered group, arguing that, unless there were exceptional circumstances, a ruler's heir had an inherent right to succeed.[84] Her views were endorsed by her neighbouring prince, the Maharaja of Gwalior, who articulated the princes' fear that the government was trying, "ipso facto," to deprive them of their "full sovereignty in internal affairs."[85] This concern with British intrusion was a matter of great consequence, since, having been fully expressed at the 1916 conference, it became a nagging obsession for the princes, leading them, as Ramusack has pointed out, to underestimate the

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[82] *Proceedings of the Conference of Ruling Princes and Chiefs: Held at Delhi on the 30th October 1916 and Following Days*. Delhi: Superintendent Government Printing, 1916, 38.
[83] *Ibid.*, 7.
[84] *Ibid.*, 7.
[85] *Ibid.*, 76-77. Eventually, the conference passed a resolution which neglected to mention whether government consent was or was not required in succession cases. *Ibid.*, 97-98.

challenge of Indian nationalists to their position in the pre-independence period.[86] The particular opinions put forward by Sultan Jahan Begam were also significant in that they foreshadowed a pivotal debate in the mid-1920s over the successor to Bhopal's throne. This precedent-setting episode will be discussed later in the chapter.

Though Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for India, was concerned with the difficulties that had been precipitated by the gathering, Chelmsford and his Political officers, as well as the princes, were determined to make the Chiefs' Conference an annual event. Grudging approval was granted by Chamberlain for a second conference to be held in November, 1917, but he insisted that the topics on the agenda be strictly limited. His restrictions hung over the rather innocuous programme, despite his replacement by Edwin Montagu, a more impetuous figure, as Secretary of State in the summer of 1917. As a result, the conference was somewhat of a disappointment, apart from the increased princely attendance. Though certain rulers attempted to raise more controversial issues such as the social ranking and salutes of princes, discussion was generally limited to matters like agricultural development and horse-breeding operations. Only a few princes, including the loyal Begam of Bhopal, managed to speak about these topics with any enthusiasm.[87] The arrival of Montagu in India on the day after the conference, however, filled the gathered princes with anticipation.

During his subsequent tour of India, held in preparation for constitutional reforms, Montagu made a special effort to meet with a large number of the princes, both in Delhi and in their own states. Sultan Jahan Begam was, however, one of only about a dozen rulers, including the Maharajas of Alwar, Gwalior and Bikaner, whom he visited more than once. As he expressed in his diary, he was fascinated by this small shrouded woman, who barely spoke English, yet played such a dynamic role in all-India politics.[88] This response was in contrast to his reaction to the preeminent Indian Muslim prince, the Nizam of Hyderabad, whom he found to be arrogant and disagreeable.[89] Montagu's regard for the Begam of Bhopal was evidently reciprocated. In a letter to Davis, written after his return to England, she remarked:

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[86] Ramusack, *Princes*, 70.
[87] *Proceedings of the Conference of Ruling Princes and Chiefs: Held at Delhi on the 5th November 1917 and Following Days*. Delhi: Superintendent Government Printing, 1917, 72-73, 81-81.
[88] Montagu, *Indian Diary*, 22, 328.
[89] *Ibid.*, 138, 212.

> ...it is impossible to deny that, by reason of the splendid work he has done for India, Mr. Montagu has acquired a tremendous hold upon the country. True, he is not liked in some quarters... but Princes and people alike have been extremely touched by proofs of his sincere sympathy with the legitimate aspirations of the country... no one with a grain of justice and fairness in his composition will deny the value of the constructive work which his imaginative statesmanship has achieved at this time of crisis...[90]

Such comments are revealing, not only of her admiration for Montagu, whom she echoed in using the term "legitimate," but also of her growing regard for the political aims, though not necessarily the methods, of the agitators. This sympathy became all the more apparent in subsequent years.

One of the aims of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, issued in April, 1918, was to standardize relations between the British and the ruling chiefs. A permanent consultative body, referred to as the Chamber of Princes, was to be established to discuss matters of common interest. In order that the membership could be adequately defined, it was decided to draw a "definite line" between those princes who enjoyed full internal sovereignty and those who did not. Furthermore, it was stated that all "important" states should be placed in direct political relations with the Government of India.[91] Though these proposals represented an effort to involve the princes in a program of reform, if only as a conservative bulwark, there was still little attempt, as Peter Robb has pointed out, to actually fit them into a scheme of Indian self-government. It had been suggested by Montagu that the Chamber of Princes should be associated with an upper legislative chamber, but this recommendation, having been rejected by Chelmsford, was not included. Undoubtedly, it was because, at this point, no one had worked out the constitutional status of the princes in an independent, or even semi-independent, India.[92]

The ruling chiefs were invited to express their reactions to the proposals at a third conference in Delhi in January, 1919. Sultan Jahan Begam, like most other leading princes, placed herself firmly behind the reforms. Even on the controversial issues of membership of the Chamber of Princes and direct relations with the government, she spoke out in favour of the report's amendments. Like rulers from other big states, she felt that a differentiation needed to be made between full-powered rulers, who would be able to attend the Chamber,

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[90] Sultan Jahan Begam to Davis, the former PA, 22 Dec., 1920, NAI(B), BSR No. 1 (B. 59), 1920.

[91] See chapter X on "The Native States" in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, printed in *Constitutional and National Development in India*. New Delhi: Ess Publications, 1981, 190-198.

[92] P.G. Robb. *The Government of India and Reform: Policies towards Politics and the Constitution, 1916-21*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, 267-268.

and lesser rulers, who would not. She passionately argued against the suggestion that certain dynamic rulers from small states should have their powers augmented to make them eligible for the Chamber. Though she contended that she was simply trying to stop the Chamber from being "unwieldy," the Begam's arguments represent a further attempt to defend the privileged status of her elite group.[93]

Following this meeting, Sultan Jahan Begam distanced herself from princely gatherings. She did not attend the final Chiefs' Conference in November, 1919, nor the inauguration of the Chamber of Princes in January, 1921.[94] Though her reasoning is uncertain, it appears that she may have been concerned about matters of prestige; excluding herself from the gathering could have been preferable to tarnishing her image by mixing with rulers of inferior status. This motivation seems likely when considering the Begam's vehement objection to the inclusion of lesser princes, as well as the boycott of the institution by other nineteen- and twenty-one gun rulers, including Hyderabad, Baroda, Mysore and Indore. A second explanation may have had its roots in religious rivalry. As a large number of the active princes were Hindu Rajputs, it seems that the Muslim rulers, along with the Maratha chiefs, may have feared that they would be controlled by this dominant group. When it was decided to call the Chamber 'Narendra Mahal,' a name based in the Hindu tradition, despite the objections of both the Begam and the Nizam,[95] Muslim princes may have felt their concerns were justified. Finally, she could have been influenced by more mundane factors such as her lack of facility in English or the distance of her state from the Chamber headquarters in Delhi; as Copland has noted, the majority of rulers active in the Chamber were both fluent in English and within easy travelling distance of the imperial capital by motor car.[96]

Regardless of her reason, it is clear that the Begam of Bhopal had turned against the idea of a consultative princely body. In a letter to Davis, the former Political Agent, written late in 1920, she confirmed unequivocally that she had no intention of being involved with the new institution, as she had "never been enamoured with the idea of the Chamber of Princes."[97]

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[93] *Proceedings of the Conference of Ruling Princes and Chiefs: Held at Delhi on the 20th January 1919 and Following Days*. Delhi: Superintendent Government Printing, 1919, 78. Eventually, it was decided that princes with a permanent salute of eleven guns or higher would be eligible for membership in the Chamber of Princes. Smaller princes were represented by members elected from among their group.

[94] She was not the only one; only 30 of the 109 princes who were entitled to seats attended the first meeting of the Chamber of Princes. Copland, *Princes*, 45.

[95] See correspondence between government officers and the two Muslim rulers in IOR, L/P&S/10/916.

[96] Copland, *Princes*, 47.

[97] Sultan Jahan Begam to Davis, the former PA, 22 Dec., 1920, NAI(B), BSR No. 1 (B. 59), 1920.

Though her rejection of the organization meant that Bhopal's interests were not so well represented in princely politics in the 1920s, the balance was redressed in the following two decades. Sultan Jahan's successor, Hamidullah Khan, realizing the potential of the body, became an active member of the Chamber following his accession. He fulfilled the role of Chancellor, the highest post in the organization, first in 1931-32 and again in 1944-47, playing a central role in the negotiations that preceded independence. Under his direction, the princes were shaped into a significant force in all-India politics and Bhopal was given status far beyond its actual size.[98]

The Early Khilafat Movement, 1919-1920

During the First World War, Muslim protests against the war in Turkey had generally been kept at bay by promises from the British Prime Minister that Turkish sovereignty would be respected after the war. When, in 1919, however, rumours began circulating that harsh peace terms would, after all, be imposed on the Ottoman Empire, Indian Muslims launched an agitation to protect their temporal leader, the Caliph, and the Muslim holy places from foreign domination. 'Abdul Bari of Firangi Mahal issued a *fatwa*, directing faithful Muslims to perform *jihad* if there was any attempt by non-believers to usurp the Hijaz. Deputations arrived in London and Paris to plead the Khilafat cause to British Cabinet ministers and diplomats. In Bombay, a Khilafat Committee was founded, under the leadership of M.M. Chotani, an affluent Bombay merchant, to collect funds for the fight. The final phase of pan-Islamic disturbance was under way.[99]

Though nearly every Indian Muslim was concerned about Turkey's future, their protests took many different forms. Older-style politicians, having always advocated collaboration, were unwilling to jeopardize their relations with the government, particularly after the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms had granted communal representation to Muslims on the new councils. Eager to participate in the electoral scheme, they limited their Khilafat activities to simply expressing their concern. On the other end of the spectrum was the more radical element, led by the 'Ali brothers and their '*ulama* collaborators, who, with the assistance of the new Congress leader, M.K. Gandhi, brought the Khilafat agitation to a

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[98] For a credible account of Hamidullah's activities as Chancellor, particularly in 1944-47, see V.P Menon. *Integration of the Indian States*. London: Sangam Books Limited, 1956.

[99] For the factors involved in the emergence of the movement, see Minault, *Khilafat*, ch. 2.

grassroots level, organizing country-wide *hartals* and non-cooperation. Excluded from the new councils, these renowned malcontents brought the issue of Muslim identity to the fore. A moderate group also emerged, which included industrialists, like Chotani, and landed gentry, like the Raja of Mahmudabad. Though eager to defend their religion, these politicians feared losing their privileges and, thus, sought to confine the agitation to deputations and sombre meetings.[100] Though many Bhopalis were attracted to the platform of the radicals, it is a feature of this historical episode that both Sultan Jahan Begam and Hamidullah Khan abandoned their earlier polarized extremism for the moderate position.

In September, 1919, at a conference in Lucknow, Chotani's Bombay Khilafat Council was extended into the All-India Central Khilafat Committee, an organization still centred in Bombay, but with branches throughout India. It included prominent Muslims, including Chotani, the 'Ali brothers, Dr. Ansari, Abul Kalam Azad and Hasrat Mohani, as well as the Congress leader, Gandhi. The first endeavour of the Committee was to call Khilafat Day on the 17th of October, 1919, a day on which shops would be closed across India so that all Muslims could pray, fast and hold meetings to demonstrate against the betrayal of Turkey. Though it represented a feat of organization, it was not a great success. Even in the Muslim city of Bhopal, it was reported that the day had passed fairly uneventfully. No prayers had been offered in the mosques, nor shops closed. A few young men had come from Bombay to stir up trouble, but they had received no assistance from the Maulvis of the city and had left quietly at the behest of the local police.[101]

In early 1920, however, Khilafat agitations heated up, following a virulent speech by the Archbishop of Canterbury in which he asserted that Turkish power should be crushed as it had been during the crusades, and the release from jail of 'Young Party' leaders. Several rousing provincial Khilafat conferences were held and grand appeals were made for contributions to the cause. It was decided to initiate non-cooperation and a boycott of British goods should the Treaty of Sèvres be unfavourable to Muslim interests. In order to spread the word to female Muslims, the mothers and wives of male leaders, including Bi Amman, Begam Muhammad 'Ali and Begam Hasrat Mohani, were also called upon to address large women's meetings. As Minault has documented, they used evocative Muslim female symbols

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[100] The changing might of these groups during the protest is discussed in Robinson, *Separatism*, ch. 8-9. For Gandhi's specific role, see Judith M. Brown. *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. London: Yale University Press, 1989, ch. 5.

[101] Hamidullah Khan, CS, Bhopal, to Col. C.E. Luard, PA, 23 Oct., 1919, NAI(B), BSR No. 175 (B. 61), 1920.

such as the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, to encourage women to make sacrifices in the cause of Islam. Women were urged to donate their gold ornaments to the Khilafat crusade, defend Islamic culture by teaching their children religious faith and patriotism, and assert themselves as "masters" of their homes by convincing their husbands to take part in the movement.[102]

At this time, the preeminent female politician of India, the Begam of Bhopal, also became involved in the agitations, although in her own distinctive way, when Col. C.E. Luard, the new Political Agent in Bhopal, decided to overstep the recently appointed Chief Secretary of the state, Nawabzada Hamidullah Khan, to address her directly on the Khilafat issue. In his letter, he defended the Government of India's efforts to represent Indian Muslims during the Turkish peace process by undermining the anti-British agitation that had been initiated on behalf of the Caliph by young Muslims in collaboration with the *'ulama*. His intention was to encourage the Begam, as a loyal Muslim leader, to counter extremist propaganda by rallying moderate opinion to the side of the government.[103] In this aim, he was essentially unsuccessful. Not only did Sultan Jahan Begam refuse to disseminate any counter-propaganda in her state, but she also defended the very Muslim sentiments and activities against which Luard was rallying. She asserted that the comments of certain British ministers, as well as "unfortunate incidents," like the Cawnpore Mosque affair, had led Indian Muslims to feel that the British government was "not quite" on their side and, therefore, might agree to unsatisfactory Turkish peace terms. She warned that, should this occur, the *'ulama* may be encouraged to issue a proclamation of *jihad*, a situation which would have "an electric effect on the heated imagination of the masses and lead to outbursts of religious fervour and fanatical zeal which will be uncontrollable in their fury." In order to avoid this "desperate course," she urged the Allied powers to treat the Turks with leniency, safeguarding the integrity of the Ottoman Empire.

The Begam's advice was quite as unwelcome as that of the Nizam of Hyderabad, when he had advised Lord Chelmsford to release the interned *'ulama* of Deoband in July, 1918.[104] Both Muslim rulers had extended their purview as leaders of the Muslim community, titles conferred upon them by the British, further than the government had intended. Yet the Begam continued to prove herself to be a pragmatic politician. At the outset of her letter, she

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[102] Minault, "Purdah Politics," 253-255.
[103] Luard to Sultan Jahan Begam, 29 Feb., 1920, NAI(B), BSR No. 175 (B. 61), 1920.
[104] For reference to this incident, see Ramusack, *Princes*, 53.

elucidated that she was giving her true and informed views on the Khilafat question, not because she was in agreement with the extremists, but because she was a "staunch friend and well-wisher" of the British government. She also assured Luard that, despite the long connections between Indian Muslims and the Caliph, she and her sons would keep a close watch for any seditious activities in their state, upholding Bhopal's tradition of loyalty as it had been established during the reign of Sikandar Begam.[105] Such an assertion rightly gave the impression that the Begam was not so much anti-British, as pro-Turkish. By couching her concerns in terms of her fidelity to the British, she was able to gain certain concessions for her religious community, acquire an advantaged position as an intermediary between the government and the Muslim community, and protect her status as an independent ruler.

In all official correspondence with the Government of India, Sultan Jahan Begam maintained, as she did in the above letter, that the Khilafat agitation would not touch on the Bhopali people. Political files from within the state, however, tell a different story. Before the second Khilafat Day was held on the 19th of March, 1920, posters and pamphlets advertising the protest and explaining the case of the Central Khilafat Committee were distributed throughout the state.[106] On the actual day, the *hartal* was observed in Bhopal city by the closing of shops. A meeting, attended by around 15,000 people, was also held after Friday prayers, at which resolutions were passed, first, thanking the Viceroy and Secretary of State for their efforts for the Muslim cause and, second, expressing the anxiety of both Hindu and Muslim subjects of Bhopal regarding the Khilafat question. They requested the British government to keep Turkish rule intact, with all its previous "integrity and possessions," while acknowledging the Sultan as the Caliph of the whole Muslim world.[107] Following the gathering, a small deputation went to the palace to present the resolutions to Hamidullah Khan, in the hopes that he would forward them to his mother, then the Viceroy.

Hamidullah, in his role of Chief Secretary, reported to Luard that, despite the "impolite" tone of the pamphlets advertising the meeting throughout India, the gathering in Bhopal had been "very moderate." Though the resolutions showed the "true feelings" of the Bhopal public, they were not hostile to the government, a fact which confirmed his belief that

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[105] Sultan Jahan Begam to Luard, 12 Mar., 1920, NAI(B), BSR No. 175 (B. 61), 1920. These same views were subsequently conveyed in an abbreviated form by cable to the Viceroy and the King-Emperor. See Wire Express of Sultan Jahan Begam to Chelmsford, n.d., *ibid.*

[106] Copies of this Urdu literature were collected by state officers and kept in the relevant file. *Ibid.*

[107] "Translation of Proceedings of Meeting held on 19th March, 1920 at Umrao Dula garden at Bhopal" in NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 20/6, 1920.

nothing "disquieting" would happen in the state. In reflection of his own more moderate stance, he also assured Luard that he had kept a close eye on the proceedings and taken the opportunity of the deputation's visit to explain that both the Government of India and ministers in Britain were trying to get the best possible agreement for Turkey.[108] By the time the Turkish peace terms were announced in India on the 14th of May, however, many Bhopalis were no longer willing to accept that the government was on the side of the Muslim people. Disregarding the pleas made by the Viceroy that they accept the peace terms with "resignation, courage and fortitude,"[109] they began to show more open sympathy with the agitators. Even the Begam, who had always been so cautious in her relations with the British, demonstrated her support for Muslim demands, as will be seen in the next section.

The Khilafat Agitation and Non-cooperation, 1920-1924

Gandhi's leadership role in the Khilafat movement was conditional on the success of his creed of non-violence. If it did not prove to be effective, many Muslim agitators were willing to resort to more characteristic Islamic methods of protest, including *jihad* or *hijra*. Though *jihad* seemed a futile exercise without the forthcoming assistance of other Muslim countries, *hijra* was considered possible. In the summer of 1920, around 30,000 Indian Muslims crossed the Frontier to Afghanistan, the closest *dar ul-Islam*, after a *fatwa* was issued by Maulana 'Abdul Bari supporting the migration.[110] Though most of the *muhajirin* were from Sind or Punjab, a significant number also came from Bhopal. From early May, 1920, the Bhopal government and the Central India Agency exchanged lists of subjects, including numerous state employees, who had left the state for Afghanistan. Having left Bhopal with much pageantry, many of them returned, like *muhajirin* from elsewhere, disappointed with the cool reception they had received from their brother Muslims.[111] Whether these emigrants, who had left India in protest at government policy, should be allowed to return to their state soon became a critical issue.

Luard, the Political Agent, warned state officers that, though the matter was at their

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[108] Hamidullah Khan to Luard, 20 Mar., 1920, *ibid.* In much of Hamidullah's correspondence with Luard, he tried to reassure him that he was no longer involved with seditious activities or agitators, but was working on the side of the government. See various letters in NAI(B), BSR No. 175 (B. 61), 1920.

[109] The Viceroy's expressions of sympathy were printed in *Jarida*, the Bhopal Gazette, 17 May, 1920.

[110] For the background to the *hijrat* movement, see M. Naeem Qureshi. "The ''Ulamā' of British India and the Hijrat of 1920," *Modern Asian Studies*, 13, 1 (1979), 41-59.

[111] See Luard to Hamidullah Khan, 7 May, 1920; Hamidullah Khan to Luard, 4 Aug., 1920; Hamidullah Khan to Luard, 2 Jun., 1920; and Luard to Hamidullah Khan, 13 Aug., 1920, NAI(B), BSR No. 175 (B. 61), 1920.

discretion, to permit these extremists to return to Bhopal could lead to problems in the state or, more importantly, a deterioration of relations with British India.[112] In making this statement, he appears to have taken a rather strict view of the Government of India's policy on *hijrat*, advocating strong-arm tactics over the more favoured peaceful methods of propaganda and postal censorship.[113] Nevertheless, Sultan Jahan agreed to act in "complete cooperation" with British policy, as it was elucidated by Luard, following his lead on returning *muhajirin*, as well as any other Khilafat issue.[114] Despite her pledge, those Bhopalis who wished to either emigrate or return were permitted to come and go without interference. Other state subjects, who had given "fanatical" speeches in favour of *jihad* at the Khilafat Workers Conference in Delhi, were similarly allowed to return to Bhopal, apparently without undergoing the legal proceedings advocated by the Government of India for violent agitators.[115] A *swadeshi* company was also tolerated in the state capital, even though it was believed to have connections with a "political chain" and had been discouraged by Luard.[116]

Sultan Jahan also seemed increasingly to disregard the government's warnings about certain Khilafat leaders. A blind eye was turned when Gandhi, Shaukat 'Ali and Bi Amman, as well as numerous other political workers, visited the state to give lectures.[117] Furthermore, she frequently welcomed other "dangerous" politicians, most notably Dr. Ansari, Sarojini Naidu and Hakim Ajmal Khan, as honoured guests to Bhopal. To British officials, she defended her association with these radicals on the basis that they came to the state to give medical treatment or to discuss other political causes such as the women's movement or the revival of Yunani medicine.[118] Whatever her official justification for tolerating these various political activities and individuals, the ruling Begam's actions undoubtedly reflect her growing sympathy, as a devout Muslim, with the Khilafat movement, as well as her curiosity about contemporary political events. She was falling into line with more radical Muslim female intellectuals, like Begam Rokeya and Nazar Sajjad Hyder, who offered their support for non-

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[112] Luard to Hamidullah Khan, 3 Jun., 1920, NAI(B), BSR No. 175 (B. 61), 1920.
[113] For the Government of India's policy on *hijrat*, see Robb, *Evolution*, 271.
[114] Hamidullah Khan to Luard, 5 Jun., 1920, *ibid.*
[115] Luard to Hamidullah, 15 May, 1920, *ibid.*
[116] Luard to Hamidullah Khan, 11 May, 1920; Hamidullah Khan to Luard, 12 May, 1920, *ibid.*
[117] See Luard to Hamidullah Khan, 21 Mar., 1920, *ibid.*, as well as the Fortnightly Reports on the political situation in Central India, especially for the fortnights ending 28 Feb., 1921 and 31 Jan., 1922, IOR, CR, R/1/1/950 and R/1/1/1387.
[118] Their visits to the state were chronicled both in letters between the Political Agent and the Bhopal government, and the Fortnightly Reports on the political situation in Central India. Relevant files include NAI(B), BSR No. 11 (B. 89), 1923-24; and IOR, CR, R/1/1/950 and R/1/1/1387.

cooperation and *swadeshi* in articles in *Tahzib un-Niswan* and other journals.[119]

Despite her religious sentiments, the Begam would not tolerate any form of open sedition, which could jeopardize her relations with the paramount power. She promptly agreed to move against Congress workers in the state in December, 1921, though their operations had been overlooked by the Bhopal State Police for several months, when British authorities became involved and reminded her that "lecturing" was prohibited in Bhopal.[120] Similarly, when two Maulvis were caught red-handed by the Political Agent's officials giving "objectionable speeches" in Sehore, Hamidullah Khan, at his mother's orders, acted decisively to constrain their activities.[121] Far worse, in the Begam's mind, than seditious speeches, however, was non-cooperation. Such practices could undermine the whole basis of British rule upon which her own status depended. They could also unsettle the efforts of loyal Muslims, like herself, who followed the example of Sayyid Ahmad Khan in seeking to achieve progress for their community within the framework of the Empire. Such feelings also led her to move resolutely against educational non-cooperation at Aligarh College, as it was advocated by radical leaders, like the 'Ali brothers and Gandhi.

Her attention was first drawn to the situation, when, in mid-October, 1920, Shaukat 'Ali held a grand meeting on campus, encouraging students and trustees to transform the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College into a National University by disaffiliating it from Allahabad University and rejecting the government's grant-in-aid. When students agreed to act upon his advice and depart from the institution , the honorary secretary and principal of the College called upon all old boys and trustees, including Hamidullah Khan, to come to Aligarh to help arrest the situation. Sultan Jahan Begam promptly sent the Nawabzada, after briefing him on the means to proceed. Her most important step was to authorize him to announce her decision to revoke Bhopal's grants to the College should it continue to adopt "extremist advice." Hamidullah, from his insider's position, ably fulfilled his mother's orders, effectively moderating the opinion of both students and trustees through careful negotiations with the rebels. Shaukat Ali's proposals were rejected by the trustees and the tension was eventually dispersed.[122] For his efforts on behalf of the moderates, the Nawabzada received

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[119] See Hossain, *Rokeya*, 218; and Minault, "Urdu Women's Magazines," 4.

[120] Report on the political situation in Central India for the fortnight ending 15 Dec., 1921, IOR, CR, R/1/1/950.

[121] Hamidullah Khan to Luard, 20 Aug., 1920, NAI(B), BSR No. 175 (B. 61), 1920.

[122] This description of events relies on Hamidullah Khan's own account, as it was contained in a report submitted to Sultan Jahan Begam on 31 Oct., 1920. It was forwarded by the Begam to the Viceroy, with a covering letter, on 3 Nov., 1920, as an "impartial view" of events. IOL, Chelmsford Collection, MSS.Eur.E. 264/25.

the praise of the Viceroy, who, just a few years earlier, had spurned him as a result of his extremist political activities.[123]

In connection with this incident at Aligarh, Sultan Jahan Begam claimed that neither she nor her son were interested in political movements in British India.[124] Nevertheless, she again offered her advice to the Government of India on issues connected with the Khilafat movement in March, 1921. This candid epistle, addressed directly to the Viceroy, signified a vital change in her political outlook, since, as she specified herself, it was intended to provide "some service," not only to the Empire, as before, but also to her own community. She spoke in comparatively severe terms of the thoroughly "unsatisfactory" Treaty of Sèvres, asserting that something had gone very wrong with the imperial system for it to become a general impression that the British government, as distinct from the Government of India, was hostile to the Muslim cause. This impression was, in fact, generally correct; both Lloyd George and Chamberlain, as well as Curzon, Hardinge and others connected with the India Office, had expressed strong anti-Turkish sentiments.[125] Recognizing that the only means to end the widespread disorder flourishing in India was for the British government to strike down this impression, she urged Chelmsford to show "unmistakeable proof" of his regard for Muslim opinion by yielding to the wishes of Indian Muslims on the Khilafat question.[126] This abrupt advice revealed that Sultan Jahan Begam was no longer willing to abandon her religious brethren to the will of the British government, but had strongly identified with the Khilafatists.

The Begam's sympathies were confirmed by Channing Arnold, an English gentleman, who worked in Bhopal as a tutor to the sons of her eldest son, Nawab Nasrullah Khan. He reported in December, 1921 that most Muslims of the state, from the ruler down to the young boys he taught, were infected with Khilafat prejudices. Though their anti-British feelings were "veiled," he felt sure that the hostility was "deep seated and bitter." Habibullah Khan, one of his young charges, was destined to be the future ruler of Bhopal, yet his mind had been "poisoned by vile lies and malicious gossip against England." In reflection of general opinion in the state, his views on the Amritsar massacre and Gandhi's non-cooperation movement were in line with those of the most extreme politicians.[127] Luard stepped in to defend

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[123] Chelmsford to Sultan Jahan Begam, 12 Nov., 1920, *ibid.*
[124] Sultan Jahan Begam to Chelmsford, 3 Nov., 1920, *ibid.*
[125] See Robb, *Evolution*, 272.
[126] Sultan Jahan Begam to Chelmsford, 6 Mar., 1921, IOL, Chelmsford Collection, MSS.Eur.E.264/26.
[127] "Confidential Note by Mr. Arnold, Tutor to the Sons of the Nawab Sahib," IOR, CR, R/1/1/954.

Bhopal's ruling family, just as Bosanquet had done during the war. He accepted that Sultan Jahan Begam and Hamidullah Khan, as well as much of Bhopal's public, were in favour of some aspects of the Khilafat movement, but he assured his superiors that they were too practical to be led astray by extremist opinion.[128]

Though government attention was deflected on this occasion, Political officers could not help but notice the depth of Sultan Jahan Begam's feeling on the Khilafat issue when she put her views to the Government of India for a third time. When D.P. Blakeway, the new AGG, visited the Begam in February, 1922, she freely communicated her opinion that the government was wrong to take active measures against the extremists, as this method just had the effect of "irritating" the people still further. Like Congress 'moderates,' including Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and M.R. Jayakar, she instead suggested that a round-table conference might be beneficial, but only if all political offenders were released and permitted to attend, and the government was honest about the international reasons which had prevented them from recognizing Muslim demands.[129] Beyond that, she was in favour of a "general surrender" to the terms of the non-cooperation party. The pensions of Sir Michael O'Dwyer and General Dyer, who were responsible for the Amritsar massacre, should be rescinded, and a promise of further steps toward self-government be made.[130] The Begam's lack of apprehension in expressing such contentious opinions to the AGG suggests that her allegiance to her religious group was triumphing over her princely need to appease the paramount power. Not surprisingly, Lord Reading, the new Viceroy, was appalled that the Begam of Bhopal should hold "such advanced views." In a reversal of Minto's non-interventionist policy, he encouraged local officers to do everything possible to "correct" her perspective.[131]

Relations with the British deteriorated still further in May of the subsequent year, when it was announced that Hamidullah Khan, along with Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr. Ansari, was on the directorate of a company having rights to trade in Turkey. Though they cared little about the project, officers in Central India were most perturbed that the name of the

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[128] Luard to D.B. Blakeway, AGG, 15 Dec., 1921, *ibid.*

[129] For the view of Congress 'moderates,' see D.A. Low. "The Government of India and the First Non-Co-operation Movement 1920-1922" in R. Kumar, ed. *Essays on Gandhian Politics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, 312

[130] Blakeway to J.P. Thompson, Officer on Special Duty, 8 Feb., 1922, IOR, CR, R/1/1/875.

[131] Thompson to Blakeway, 24 Feb., 1922, *ibid.* For a discussion of Reading's renewal of an interventionist policy in the early 1920s, see Copland, *Princes*, 50-56.

Begam's youngest son was again in "close conjunction" with those of dangerous agitators.[132] Subsequent reports that Bhopal's 'Young Party' had taken over the State Council, which had been established the previous year during the visit of the Prince of Wales, raised further alarm. Blakeway warned his superiors in Delhi that Hamidullah, who led the dominant group on the Council, was now even more "strongly imbued with Khilafat prejudices," having "fallen under very undesirable political influences." Such reports were particularly troubling, as it had been disclosed by Sir Israr Hasan Khan, a loyal Bhopali official, that the ruling Begam was now no more than a "mouthpiece" of the Nawabzada, spouting his extremist politics.[133]

The situation reached a climax in September, 1923, when lavish festivities were held in Bhopal to celebrate the peace with Turkey. Public arches were erected, state buildings decorated and a procession taken through the streets to present an address to the ruling Begam. There was nothing inherently seditious in this oration, as it only documented the religious nature of the attachment between the Muslims of India and Turkish Caliph.[134] Nevertheless, the circumstances surrounding its presentation evoked outrage from British officials. Not only were the activities organized by state officials who were believed to be members of pan-Islamic organizations, but the address was read by Qazi Faiyaz Husain, a law officer, who was renowned for his virulent anti-British sentiments.[135] Many officers of questionable loyalty also carried portraits of Nawabzada Hamidullah Khan during the parade, thus implicating him as a leader of the subversive group. The Nawabzada had actually intended to join the procession himself, until he was discouraged by his older brother, Obaidullah Khan, who resigned his position as Army Member of the State Council in protest at the activities. Hamidullah did, however, attend the prayers which were held in the evening, prior to a display of illuminations. None of the activities was attended by either the Begam's two elder sons, or Israr Hasan. They remained aloof on the basis that the occasion was

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[132] Report on the political situation in Central India for the fortnight ending 31 May, 1923, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1387. Since his earlier indiscretions, there had only been one vague rumour that Hamidullah was still involved with extremist Muslims. In 1919, he was reported to have made a donation to Hasrat Mohani of the Central Khilafat Committee to give a "sensational" lecture in Delhi, but this was later denied. See Muhammad Abdurrazzaq, retired Sub-Inspector of Police, UP, to Holland, 12 May, 1919, IOR, CR, R/1/1/926.

[133] Blakeway to G.D. Ogilvie, Offg. PS, 1 Oct., 1923, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1499.

[134] "Address of Thanks given by Residents of Bhopal to Her Highness in honour of the Peace with Turkey, dated 25 Sept., 1923," *ibid.*

[135] In 1920, Qazi Faiyaz Husain was reported to have conspired to murder the Political Agent. Though the plot never materialized, he regularly lectured in the mosques of Bhopal, urging the people to take up the cry of *jihad*. He also held numerous private meetings to spread his views, collected subscriptions for the Khilafat Committee in Bombay and induced people to use swadeshi goods. Translation of confidential, anonymous letter to Luard, 14 Nov., 1920, *ibid.*

"tainted with disloyalty."[136]

Perhaps the greatest affront to the British officers, however, was that the Political Agent was not invited to the ceremony. Bhopal's Political Secretary, Qazi 'Ali Haidar Abbasi, defended this omission on the basis that the function was a private gathering, but reports suggested otherwise. Blakeway promptly identified the slight, not merely as a insult to the Political Agent, but as a serious "divergence" of British and Muslim aspirations. The Begam was evidently turning a "readier ear" to her son's views, which were influenced by the "Aligarh party," than the practical advice of the Government of India. He suggested that a "word of caution" be issued to her by higher officials, reminding her that a British representative ought to be invited to events, like a celebration of the peace with Turkey, in order to highlight the "common purpose" uniting Bhopal and the British. He felt this warning was necessary to show the Begam that the Government of India was "not indifferent" to the growth of extremism in her state. "She will thus," he concluded, "be afforded an opportunity to pause and think whether her recent policy is in the true interests of her family and the State..."[137]

Sultan Jahan Begam was in line to be admonished, just as the Raja of Mahmudabad had been in 1916, not to meddle in politics if she wished to keep her government-granted privileges. The recent treatment of the Maharaja of Nabha, an Akali supporter, who had been removed from the throne under police escort just months before, warned that the consequences could be dire.[138] Relations between Bhopal and the Government of India had not been so rocky since her mother's reign. The situation was temporarily eased at this time by the Viceroy, who, in reflection of his lawyer's training, asserted that many of the charges against the Begam could not be substantiated. Undoubtedly, he also realized the value of her support and friendship at a time when the spheres of politics and religion were becoming even more closely intertwined. Dismissing the arguments of his advisors, he offered to reconsider only if more reports of extremist activity in the state were received.[139] Shortly after, the Muslim agitation in India collapsed when the Turks themselves announced that they had abolished the Khilafat. The Begam of Bhopal promptly exhibited her sympathy for the

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[136] Blakeway to Ogilvie, 1 Oct., 1923, *ibid.*
[137] *Ibid.*
[138] For a discussion of this incident, see Ramusack, "Incident at Nabha," 563-77.
[139] Ogilvie to Blakeway, 16 Oct., 1923, *ibid.*

deposed Caliph by sanctioning a lifetime maintenance grant.[140] But her confrontational foray into religion-inspired politics was essentially finished. Nevertheless, conflict with the government grew in the next two years over the issue of succession, a topic which will be discussed in a subsequent section. In the meantime, there was a greater problem to face: the people. Conflict between Bhopal's Muslim rulers and Hindu subjects was just starting to surface.

The Emergence of People's Movements in Bhopal

With the emergence of the Khilafat-non-cooperation movement, and its accompanying policy of Hindu-Muslim unity, in the late 1910s, nationalist politicians of all religious stripes, including Gandhi and the 'Ali brothers, chose to disregard communal violence such as had occurred in towns in North India in 1917 and 1918 during the Baqr 'Id festivals in favour of realizing their short-term political agenda. Mass mobilization on a communal basis soon led, however, to Hindu-Muslim riots on a scale that could not be ignored. In this climate, sectarian organizations, notably the Hindu Mahasabha, gained new prominence, fostering heightened communal tension through press campaigns, as well as more extreme activities. Their message, as expounded in Savarkar's *Hindutva* and other texts, was simple: "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan." Muslim 'invaders,' who had initiated the fall of India's glorious ancient civilization, were to be put in their place.[141]

Bhopal was dragged into this nationalist discourse, from which it had earlier remained aloof, in the early 1920s when a spate of articles appeared in the Hindi newspapers of British India, including *Zamindar* of Lahore, *Abhyudaya* of Allahabad, *Lokmitra* of Lucknow and *Vertaman* of Cawnpore, criticizing the Begam of Bhopal's treatment of her Hindu subjects. Between April, 1923 and October, 1924, she was accused, variously, of having formed an organization to stop Hindu associations, like the Bharat Shuddhi Sabha, from reconverting Muslims in her state, introducing the Emperor Auranzeb's tyrannical methods of forcibly converting Hindus to Islam, refusing to sanction a loan of the state band and elephants to the Hindu community for their *dussehra* procession, banning the erection of new Hindu temples or the establishment of new festivals in her state, allowing a Hindu girl to be abducted and

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[140] Haidar Abbasi to Caliph 'Abdul Majid, 19 Sept., 1924, NAI(B), BSR No. 10 (B. 107), 1926.

[141] For further discussion of the heightening of communal tension in this period, see Gyanendra Pandey. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, especially 233-235.

raped by a Muslim gentleman without recourse to justice, initiating widespread cow slaughter for Muslims festivals, and tolerating pigeon shooting in Jain temples.[142] The most significant attack to date, however, came in mid-1924 as a result of press coverage of the Bhopal Apostasy Law.

In July, 1920, it was announced in the Bhopal *Jarida* that a new section was being added to the Penal Code, which stated that any person who renounced their faith after embracing Islam would be liable to a punishment consisting of either three years imprisonment, or a fine, or both.[143] The law did not attract attention in British India until April, 1924, when it was published in *Tej* of Agra, causing, what the CID referred to, as "local talk."[144] Indeed, it soon received the interest of Hindu organizations in UP and Punjab. A special meeting of all Rawalpindi branches of the Arya Samaj was held at the end of April at which it was resolved that the "savage law" was an infringement on "all sense of justice, morality and liberty of conscience," and should be abolished without delay by the Begam of Bhopal. So as to publicize their cause, the resolutions were sent to the Political Secretary and all Arya Pratinidhi Sabhas and Hindu Sabhas, as well as the Indian and foreign press.[145] On the following day, the Hindu Sabha met in Delhi before an audience of about two thousand people. The main speaker, Swami Satya Dev, criticized the administration of Bhopal state, which stood in the way of *swaraj* by not allowing "religious freedom." A resolution was passed protesting against the law and calling the attention of both the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha to the injustice.[146]

The assault on Bhopal's government continued in the press, when an "open letter" to the Begam of Bhopal was published in the Calcutta *Servant* in mid-May. Written by Pandit Sankernath, it asserted:

> [For] a long time we have been entertaining the belief that your Highness is one of the most advanced and enlightened rulers of the Native States of India... [Yet] lately the law of Apostasy has been passed by your Highness... I entertain great doubts whether this lawless and barbarous law has been passed under your Highness' cognizance or not. Most probably some of your zealous underlings got the law passed by some unfair means. Be it what it may an enlightened

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[142] See extract from *Zamindar* (Lahore), 18 Apr., 1923, reprinted in *Abhyudaya* (Allahabad), 21 Apr., 1923; extract from *Lokmitra* (Lucknow), 3 Nov., 1923; Qazi 'Ali Haidar Abbasi, PS, Bhopal, to C.H. Gabriel, PA, 17 May, 1924, NAI(B), BSR No. 22 (B. 89), 1923-24; and extract from *Pratap*, 6 Oct., 1924.

[143] *Jarida*, the Bhopal Gazette, 7 Jul., 1920.

[144] Copy of paragraph 146 of the UP Secret Abstract of Intelligence, 3 May, 1924, NAI(B), BSR No. 31 (B. 89), 1923-24.

[145] Resolution passed at a meeting of the Arya Samaj (College Section) Rawalpindi, 29 Apr., 1924, in NAI(B), BSR No. 1 (B. 99), 1924-25.

[146] Copy of Delhi Secret Abstract of Intelligence, 3 May, 1924, *ibid.*

> ruler ought never to be partisan or entertain a party feeling for any particular faith or sect... your Highness ought to repeal such a lawless law at once...[147]

Sankernath's secularist view of the state was far from typical of those who had previously criticized the Begam. Nevertheless, it led to a similar reaction. Within weeks, resolutions had been passed by Hindu organizations across India, condemning the Begam's order. Even Gandhi, who was still revered by many Muslims as a result of his involvement with the Khilafat movement, criticized the order in *Young India*, arguing that, as the law advocated compulsion, it must be against the spirit of Islam.[148]

During the first two decades of her reign, Sultan Jahan Begam had been lauded by Europeans and Indians alike for her policy of not discriminating between the religious communities of her domain. It was asserted that, as a result of her example, Bhopali Muslims, Hindus, Parsis, Christians and other communities had continued to live together in the state "like brothers," even while communal riots broke out in other areas of the country.[149] The Begam herself had insisted that the "uniform treatment" of all her subjects, without distinction of class or creed, was a "basic principle" of her good government.[150] Furthermore, even if grievances had existed, the emergence of a tangible people's protest had been tightly constrained in Bhopal, as in Gwalior, Jaipur and other states, by the autocratic control of the ruler's government. No private presses existed within state boundaries, so no hostile newspapers could be published. All public organizations required the permission of the durbar, so no inimical parties could be founded. Even private gatherings were limited by the law.[151] There was simply very little opportunity for public dissension within the state. What had changed in the early 1920s to cause such virulent attacks on the Bhopal government to appear in newspapers across the country?

Undoubtedly, some blame must lie with the Begam herself, who, in reflection of the political climate of the time, was becoming more politicized along religious lines. This process

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[147] Pandit Sankernath. "An Open Letter to Her Highness the Begum Saheba of Bhopal," *Servant* (Calcutta), 16 May, 1924.

[148] "The Bhopal Apostasy Circular" in *Young India* (Madras), 12 Jun., 1924.

[149] See comments of Mrs. Ranken, wife of Colonel George Patrick Ranken, in her 1911 article, "The Veiled Ruler," IOL, Ranken Collection, MSS.Eur.F.182; and Begam Humayon Mirza, *Roznamchah*, 35-36.

[150] Sultan Jahan Begam. "On the Parsis" [Speech delivered in May, 1916] in *Speeches of Indian Princes on Politics*, 51.

[151] These controls were laid out by Hamidullah Khan in connection with the non-cooperation movement, but they were equally effective in containing agitation against the state. Hamidullah Khan to Luard, 12 May, 1920, NAI(B), BSR No. 175 (B. 61), 1920. For a discussion of the equally restrictive laws in Gwalior, Jaipur and other states, see Copland, *Princes*, 30.

did not just affect her relations with the government, as was discussed above, but also with her own subjects. Hindu sentiments were, for instance, aggravated in 1920 when the Bhopal Produce Trust, a commercial venture of the Bhopal government, became involved with a large-scale cow slaughter project. When local Hindus expressed their ardent opposition, they were simply warned that any attempt to stir up trouble would be "severely dealt with."[152] Communal feeling was further inflamed when the manufacture and sale of country liquor was proscribed in late 1921 and total prohibition introduced in 1923. While women's groups throughout the country and even abroad hailed the Begam's attempt to improve the material conditions of her people,[153] many Bhopali Hindus simply viewed the law as a further imposition of Muslim values. Indeed, the ruling Begam admitted that she had introduced the legislation so as to bring her administration more closely in line with Islamic tenets.[154]

Despite these examples, it would be false to conclude that the Begam of Bhopal had abandoned her earlier policy of religious tolerance altogether. To have done so would have been suicidal in a state where the majority of the population was of a different religion to its ruler. That she did not is evident from a rejoinder to one of the above articles, published in the Urdu daily, *Oudh Akhbar*, in November, 1923. Written by a Bhopali Hindu, Raizada Govind Prasad Verma, it claimed that the *dussehra* committee's application to the ruling Begam for the use of the state band and elephants had been rejected, just as an appeal from the Muslim public would have been, on the basis that they did not wish to pay the required fee. This reaction, rather than being an insult to the Hindu religion, was proof of the equal treatment of the two communities by the Begam. To strengthen his position, Verma quoted several examples of Hindu temples that had been built just a year before, as well as various long-term projects undertaken by the Begam's government for the good of the Hindu community, including the establishment of a Hindu *Waqf* Department and several religious schools.(see chapter II) Overall, he affirmed that Sultan Jahan Begam was a tolerant and progressive ruler, who never gave way to communal prejudice.[155]

The validity of Verma's words regarding the religious policy of the Begam in the 1920s is confirmed, not only by state records and the testimonials given by state subjects in

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[152] Note on cow slaughter by Luard, 24 Nov., 1920, IOR, RR, R/2/425/40.
[153] See "Remarkable Reforms under a Woman Ruler" in *Stridharma* (Madras), 6 (Mar., 1923); and letters from members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in NAI(B), BSR No. 141 (B. 93), 1923-24.
[154] Report on the political situation in Central India for the fortnight ending 15 Dec., 1921, IOR, CR, R/1/1/950.
[155] Extract from *Oudh Akhbar* (Lucknow), 27 Nov., 1923.

less-charged circumstances,[156] but also by comparison with other states. In the late 1930s, similar charges were levelled at the Nizam of Hyderabad by Hindu subjects, who claimed that their freedom of worship was being constrained by laws prohibiting music within forty steps of any mosque or the building of temples in Muslim-majority areas. In making these assertions, they received the support of several independent observers, including the French Roman Catholic Bishop of Nagpur, who toured the state in 1939. Yet, as Ian Copland has argued, there is little basis for claims of "systematic 'Islamic' oppression" in the state. Hindu and Muslim groups were, in fact, treated with equality by the Nizam: public displays of religious fervour prohibited- and enforced- for all groups. His bi-partisanship in matters of religion is also evident in that he attended both Hindu and Muslim festivals, defended Hindus from accusations of impropriety, and banned both cow slaughter and conversion movements.[157] These considerations in the case of Hyderabad suggest that, to a large degree, the Bhopali agitation must also be attributed to the increased politicization of other religious groups outside the state.

This contention is supported by the fact that, on the whole, the above articles, like that responded to by Verma, were not an articulation of sincere grievances, but a deliberate misrepresentation of the truth intended to heighten communal tension. The claim that Sultan Jahan Begam had founded an organization to halt the return of Muslims to Hinduism, for instance, appeared to have no connection with her, instead referring, as the CID suggested, to a speech given by Qazi Faiyaz Husain in the Jama Masjid, calling Bhopali Muslims to halt the reclamation to Hinduism of Rajput Muslims in the Agra area by forming an Anjuman-i-Hidayat-i-Islam.[158] Similarly, the case regarding the Muslim gentleman, who had reportedly abducted and raped a Hindu girl, had actually involved a Muslim dhobi's daughter.[159] Even the extensive coverage of the Bhopal Apostasy Law was misrepresentative. As a non-Muslim from Bhopal pointed out in an anonymous letter to *United India and Indian States*, the law was not, in fact, new, but had been on the books, though in different forms, since the rule of Sikandar Begam. In order to prevent frequent reconversion for reasons other than spiritual ones, a convert to Islam was required to freely sign an agreement before the Qazi stating that

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[156] See Syed Ashfaq Ali. "Bhopal- A Shining Example of Hindu-Muslim Unity and Brotherhood" in Ali, *Bhopal*, ap. 17; and personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 19 Oct., 1995.
[157] Copland, "'Communalism' in Princely India," 789-791.
[158] Note of CID, 17 Mar., 1921, NAI(B), BSR No. 174 (B. 85), 1923.
[159] Haidar Abbasi to Gabriel, PA, 17 May, 1924, NAI(B), BSR No. 22 (B. 89), 1923-24.

if he should ever change his religion again then he must undergo a penalty. It had nothing to do with "denying liberty of conscience," as had been claimed by various Hindu groups, but rather with keeping one's religious "house" in order.[160] As Haidar Abbasi indicated to alarmed officials in Central India, outsiders were simply trying to stir up trouble.[161]

In examining external influences for the rising number of press attacks on the Begam of Bhopal in the early 1920s, a second factor is also apparent: a change in Government of India policy. In 1914, after a sectarian fracas in Bhopal between the dominant Sunni community and the Bohras, a Shi'a sect fiercely loyal to the British, legal representatives of the latter had asserted that the Bhopal state service, and especially the army, was "rotten to the core."[162] Despite the seriousness of these accusations, the claims had been dismissed by the Government of India, following a short investigation by Bosanquet, the AGG; he deemed that as there was no basis for the charges of injustice against the Begam, no further government involvement was necessary. [163] His decision reflected the government's policy of non-interference with the princes, or *laissez-faire*, as it was known, launched by Minto in 1909 to cement their loyalty in a time of constitutional change.[164] As will be seen in more detail in the following section, this policy was abandoned in the early 1920s at the instigation of Reading, the Viceroy, and staff in the Political Department, leading to the repeal of the repressive 1910 Press Act that had so effectively protected the princes from the dissemination of damaging news. Though it had been replaced in 1922, after fierce lobbying by the Chamber of Princes, the new law was extremely ineffective, proving nearly impossible to apply in practical situations. As was seen above, it was at this time that contentious articles on the Begam of Bhopal and other princes abounded.[165]

When it became apparent that the British would no longer protect the state from press attacks, Nawabzada Hamidullah Khan took other steps to reassert Bhopal's previous identity as a place of religious freedom. Khwaja Kamaluddin, Imam of the Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking, England, was invited to the state in late October, 1924 to give a public lecture on

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[160] "Wolf! Wolf!" in *United India and Indian States* (Madras), 31 May, 1924.
[161] Haidar Abbasi to A.R. Jelf, PA, 15 Oct., 1924, NAI(B), BSR No. 1 (B. 99), 1924-25.
[162] Sir Adamji Peerbhoy to Hardinge, 8 Mar., 1915, NAI(ND), GOI, F&P, Apr., 1915, Nos. 767-775.
[163] Bosanquet to Wood, 21 Mar., 1915, *ibid.*
[164] For a discussion of *laissez-faire*, see D.A. Low. "*Laissez-Faire* and Traditional Rulership in Princely India" in Jeffrey, *People, Princes and Paramount Power*, 372-287.
[165] For a discussion of the princely lobby for press protection, see Ramusack, *Princes*, 122-128. Though the Begam had remained aloof for the Chamber, she had expressed her approval for the scheme in private letters to British officials. See Sultan Jahan Begam to Luard, 9 Sept., 1920, NAI(B), BSR No. 11 (B. 65), 1920.

the history of Hindu-Muslim unity in the state and the Qur'anic basis for toleration.[166] Hamidullah himself also addressed the crowd, asserting, like Gandhi, that tolerance was an essential aspect of all religions. The disturbances that were being cultivated in the state were not due to any religious feeling on the part of the agitators, but a lack of it.[167] Despite his mother's warnings,[168] he made further efforts to appease the state's Hindu subjects after his succession by inviting nationalist leaders, including Gandhi, to Bhopal as guests of the state. Gandhi himself reacted favourably to Hamidullah's style of leadership, but his presence only succeeded in spreading ideas of *swaraj* and majority rule, thus intensifying demands for democracy.[169] By the late 1920s, Hindu organizations were becoming even more virulent in their attacks on Bhopal's Muslim leadership,[170] while state peoples' organizations, like Praja Mandals in princely states across India, were demanding real representation in government.[171]

The Bhopal Succession Debate

The assertive behaviour of the princes in the post-war period- as is exemplified by the Begam of Bhopal's intractable stand on the Khilafat issue- meant that, by the early 1920s, officers in the Political Department were beginning to question the policy of *laissez-faire* that had guided the workings of paramountcy since 1909. Reading and his Political Secretary, J.P. Thompson, concluded that non-interference had simply been carried too far. Something needed to be done to put princely troublemakers back in their place. They were provided with two prime opportunities when, first, the Maharaja of Nabha, then the Holkar of Indore, both of whom were already marked men, were implicated in acts of unquestionable indiscretion: detaining a British subject and murder. The two princes were swiftly removed from their thrones. Then, in 1925, they found, what Copland has appropriately branded their "*cause célèbre*."[172] The Nizam of Hyderabad, in a desperate effort to resolve the long dispute over

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[166] Khwaja Kamaluddin. *Muslim aur Ghair-Muslim ke Ta'alluqat*. Bhopal: Ruler of Bhopal, 1924.

[167] Shah Bano Begam, *Iftikhar ul-Mulk*, 27.

[168] Her warning was in the words of an Urdu proverb: "You are using your own axe to cut off your legs." Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 20 Oct., 1995.

[169] For an account of Gandhi's visit to Bhopal, see *Young India* (Ahmedabad), 19 Sept., 1929.

[170] See various letters, newspaper cuttings and memorandums in IOR, CR, R/1/1/2234.

[171] P.L. Chudgar, Member of Indian States' Peoples' Delegation. "Indian Peoples and Princes" in *New Leader*, 11 Jan., 1929. For a comparative discussion of the growth of Praja Mandal activities in Western India, for example, see Wood, "Indian Nationalism in the Princely Context," 250-254.

[172] Copland, *Princes*, 53. For analyses of the Hyderabad dispute, also see R.J. Moore. *The Crisis of Indian Unity 1917-1940*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, 29-32; and I.F.S. Copland. "The Hyderabad (Berar) Agreement of 1933: A Case Study in Anglo-Indian Diplomacy," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 6 (1978), 281-299.

the province of Berar in his favour, had sent a provocative letter to the Viceroy, claiming that his durbar could negotiate on equal terms with the Government of India on internal matters. His insolence was greeted by Reading, not only with personal public humiliation, but also with a warning to all rulers, issued in March, 1926, which stated:

> The sovereignty of the British Crown is supreme in India, and therefore no Ruler of any Indian State can justifiably claim to negotiate with the British Government on equal footing. Its supremacy is not based only on Treaties and Engagements but exists independently of them... The right of the British Government to intervene in the internal affairs of Indian States is [an] instance of the consequences necessarily involved in the supremacy of the British Crown...[173]

The princes were unnerved by this categorical assertion of unrestrained paramountcy. But they did not yield to the crushing will of the Political Department, as was expected by Reading and Thompson. Even as the above disputes were going on, certain rulers, including the Begam of Bhopal, continued to assert their unequivocal right to internal sovereignty. A classic example was the Bhopal succession case.

In 1924, within just a few months of each other, the Begam's two eldest sons, Nasrullah Khan and Obaidullah Khan, both died somewhat unexpectedly. Even as the heir-apparent lay on his death bed, the question of succession was raised by local British officers, who reported rumours that the ruling Begam intended to appoint Hamidullah as the new heir to the throne, in place of her grandson.[174] Just days after Nasrullah's death, she informed the Government of India of her decision to do just that. Despite the government's proclamation at the Chiefs' Conference in 1916, she claimed that treaties negotiated between the state and the paramount power in the early nineteenth century guaranteed the ruler's right to elect her own successor. Hamidullah was the obvious choice, not only because Muslim inheritance laws favoured the closer relation to the more remote, but also because of his superior character, education and experience. All that was required, she insisted, was the formal "recognition" of her decision by the Viceroy.[175] Not unexpectedly, Thompson and his underling, K.S. Fitze, were thoroughly unsympathetic to the Begam's demands. They spoke grandly of upholding the British system of primogeniture, but their primary concern appears to have been Hamidullah himself. As Fitze pointed out, had he not, during his term as Chief Secretary, made "arrogant and unjustifiable demands," created friction with the Political Agent, re-staffed the administration with a "host of minor undesirables" and treated

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[173] *Report of the Indian States Committee, 1928-29*. Delhi: Superintendent Government Printing, 1929, 56-57.
[174] Glancy, AGG, to Thompson, PS, 15 Aug., 1924, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1500.
[175] Glancy to Thompson, 13 Sept., 1924, *ibid.*

"notorious extremists" as honoured guests of the state?[176]

Realizing that she was unlikely to get a favourable response as the situation stood, the Begam began a comprehensive campaign to gain acceptance for Hamidullah's succession, hiring researchers to find a precedent in her favour, writing letters to foreign dignitaries, lobbying influential Muslim and Hindu princes, and even threatening to abdicate. Much of the Urdu and English press came out in favour of her case, asserting that Hamidullah was a distinguished politician with the support of the Bhopali people.[177] Prominent Muslim princes, on the other hand, including the Nawabs of Hyderabad and Rampur, were not in agreement, privately informing the Government of India that they did not feel that the Begam's demands should be accepted.[178] This split of opinion, as well as the Begam's persistence, forced the Political Department to look into the case in more detail. Throughout 1925, they undertook an exhaustive survey of Muslim succession cases, not only in the existing Indian Muslim states, but also in Mughal India and other Muslim states. No decision could be reached either way. In desperation, the Begam went to England in the autumn of 1925 to petition the King-Emperor. Her theatrical performance at Buckingham Palace, which concluded with her fainting in the King's audience chamber, proved to be the decisive act in her favour.[179] In March, 1926, after much evidence to the contrary, and in the same month that Reading issued his unfavourable statement on the constitutional status of the princes, Hamidullah Khan was recognized as heir-apparent of Bhopal.

The Bhopal succession case caused a previously unimaginable level of antagonism between the state of Bhopal and the British government. The friendly relations that had been maintained, at least publicly, even at the high point of the Khilafat movement, were severely challenged. In the end, the paramount power was forced to back down. But it managed to avoid losing face, as Fitze later emphasized in his autobiography, by claiming that the succession dispute had been resolved, not on the basis of the Begam's own arguments, but as a result of precedents in the first half of the nineteenth century, which were not binding in all Muslim succession cases. This qualifying statement enabled officers to assure princes who

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[176] Note of K.S. Fitze, 16 Dec., 1924, *ibid.*

[177] See newspaper cuttings from various Urdu and English newspapers in IOR, RR, R/2/453/68. In *Islamic Review*, the organ of the Muslim community in Britain, Khwaja Kamaluddin, Imam of the Woking Mosque, also made a persuasive argument in favour of Sultan Jahan Begam's case. See "Her Highness The Begum of Bhopal and Her Succession" in *Islamic Review* (Woking), 13 (Oct.-Nov., 1925), 346-353.

[178] Examination of cases cited by Fitze to Thompson, 14 Nov., 1925, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1500.

[179] I am grateful to Princess Abida Sultaan for her amusing account of this incident.

were not in favour of the decision that they would be permitted to choose between the system of primogeniture and the Muslim law of inheritance should a similar case arise in their own state in the future.[180] The tension that had arisen between the Government of India and their traditional princely allies was partially, though not entirely, diffused. The rulers continued to act as a counterweight to the popular appeal of the nationalist parties- even getting roped in to the all-India federalism plan of the early 1930s- but their loyalty could no longer be taken for granted.[181]

Having realized her power, the Begam of Bhopal was not inclined to ease her demands on the Political Department, even while it continued under the threatening direction of Thompson and Reading. Violating protocol, she informed the Viceroy by telegram, just a month after the succession case had been resolved, that she was abdicating immediately in favour of her son.[182] She requested, furthermore, that Abida Sultaan, Hamidullah's eldest daughter, be recognized officially as heir-apparent, as had already been done in the state. Faced with opposition, again on the basis of primogeniture, the Begam argued the case with as much enthusiasm as she had done that of her son, asserting, in daily letters to officials in Indore and New Delhi, that, in Bhopal, the eldest child succeeded to the throne, regardless of their gender.[183] Her support for Abida Sultaan as the future Begam of Bhopal was in keeping, not only with the admiration she expressed for women rulers in historical works on the state,(see chapter I) but also with her antithetical comments on women regents at the Chiefs' Conference in 1916, since, in this case, female rule was a means of keeping the line of succession within one branch of the ruling family. The issue was finally resolved in early 1927, when Lord Irwin, the new Viceroy, announced that, though Abida Sultaan would be recognized as heir-apparent, sons would, in future, take precedence over daughters.[184] Despite the partial nature of her victory, the elderly Begam was evidently satisfied. At the age of nearly seventy, she finally retired from the national political scene.

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[180] Dispatch on Bhopal Succession, 14 Jan., 1926, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1500. See also Sir Kenneth Fitze. *Twilight of the Maharajas*. London: John Murray, 1956, 119.

[181] See Copland, *Princes*, 56ff,

[182] Sultan Jahan Begam to the Viceroy, 29 Apr., 1926, IOR, CR, R/1/1/1502.

[183] Note by Fitze, 30 Apr., 1926; and Glancy to Thompson, 11 Dec., 1926, *ibid.*

[184] Quoted in *Bhopal State: Its Ruler and Method of Administration*. Bombay: Times of India Press, n.d.

Conclusions

In the first decade of her reign, Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam was, for the most part, engaged with the internal social and administrative reform of her state. It was not until the pre-war years that she, like other Indian Muslim women, began to play a more influential role in national politics, participating in various social and educational schemes, including the Muslim University movement, the Red Crescent Medical Mission to Turkey and the Higher Chiefs' College meetings. Views put forward in these forums confirm that Sultan Jahan Begam, unlike Bi Amman, was very much a part of what, in the context of UP, Francis Robinson has identified as the 'Old Party.' Like the Rajas of Mahmudabad and Jehangirabad, she was cautious in her dealings with more radical Muslim politicians, not only because she feared losing the social honours that had been bestowed upon her by the British, but also because she, like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, identified collaboration with the British as the best means to serve the secular interests of the Muslim community. Though she was involved with the Aligarh movement, it was from an administrative perspective. She had not picked up the modern manners and pan-Islamic outlook, which were *de rigeur* for Aligarh students, like her son, who made up the 'Young Party.'

Sultan Jahan Begam's pro-British policy meant that, during the war years, she gave generously to the war effort, issued proclamations in favour of British tactics and participated actively in the Chiefs' Conferences. Yet she was not inattentive to the needs of her own community. She remained up-to-date with extremist activities through her affiliation with Muslim leaders, like Dr. Ansari and Hakim Ajmal Khan, often representing their interests, though in a more moderate garb, to the Government of India. When, in the years after the war, religion began to overwhelm politics on the national scene, the Begam became even more open in her patronage of the political efforts of her co-religionists. She expressed her sympathy with the Khilafat movement, allowed her son to bring pan-Islamists into the Bhopal government and grandly celebrated the Turkish peace. Such a reaction was inevitable if one considers both her religious orthodoxy and her earlier connections with the Turkish Caliph.(see chapter V) Though government officers were unimpressed by the Begam's growing religiosity, they avoided any public admonishment, like that which was later issued to the Nizam of Hyderabad, on the basis that she was an indispensable ally, who, along with her son, continued to shun non-cooperation. It was only with the escalation of the Bhopal succession dispute, a case that reflected directly on British paramountcy, that relations

deteriorated significantly. Even then, they were swiftly resolved by a discreet word from the King-Emperor.

Sultan Jahan Begam's pragmatic approach enabled her strike a balance between religious and political considerations, gaining the respect of the British, the Muslim community and her own subjects. This achievement distinguished her from her princely co-religionist, Mir Osman 'Ali Khan of Hyderabad, who, despite having been eulogized in the Muslim community for his donations to partisan Muslim institutions, like the Aligarh College, and granted the august titles of "His Exalted Highness" and "Our Faithful Ally" for his generous contributions to the British war effort, was unable to stave off criticism by Muslim leaders during the Khilafat movement, nor infringement to his sovereignty by the British government in the 1920s.[185] Hamidullah Khan, the Begam's successor, having closely identified himself with wide-based Muslim movements, was similarly unsuccessful in halting encroachment to his own leadership, both within the state and at an all-India level, and to Bhopal state itself.[186] A distinction, thus, arises between politicians of different generations in Bhopal that is also evident in Muslim women's activism on the international scene. This final level of political activity will be discussed in the following chapter.

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[185] See Bawa, *Last Nizam*, 101, 110-113.
[186] See Mittal, *History of Bhopal State*, ch. 4-6.

V: Gender, Islam and the Culture of Travel[1]

Introduction

It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that the women of India and Britain began to participate in the European culture of travel, a construct that had been developed by upper-class British males at a much earlier date. For reasons of work, pilgrimage, study, politics or simply cultural exchange, growing numbers of women began making the journey between 'home' and 'abroad,' thus becoming involved in the creation of conflicting notions of 'self' and 'other.' While this dialogue has been explored in some detail from the perspective of European women in India, particularly *memsahibs* and missionaries,[2] few successful attempts have been made to approach it from the standpoint of Indian women, especially those of the Muslim community. Yet Indian Muslim women, including the women of Bhopal, did interact with foreign ideas, people and organizations, both within their own country and abroad, as a corollary of the colonial experience and long-standing religious traditions, like the *hajj*. This reciprocal contact with the Middle East, Great Britain and other Western countries significantly affected their reformist program, as well as the cultural perceptions of those they encountered.[3] It represents the final level within this study on which Muslim women operated in facilitating their political emergence.

The metaphor of travel is a useful vehicle for looking at, in particular, the issue of agency in Sultan Jahan Begam's reformist program, since it encourages one to question the degree to which her approach was influenced by her contact with 'foreign' ideas. In simple terms, was her agenda an imitation of Western thought? Or did it emerge from within a more indigenous tradition? Undoubtedly, Indian reformers of the early twentieth century could not help but be conditioned by both the colonial context in which they lived and the cultural traditions from which they sprung. Nevertheless, a clear separation can be made, as Barbara Metcalf has identified, between reformers such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Nazir Ahmad and Sayyid Amir 'Ali, who "engaged with the official British discourse on women," and others,

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[1] An earlier version of this chapter is soon to be published as "Out of India: The Journeys of the Begam of Bhopal, 1901-1930," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 21, 3 (June, 1998).

[2] See, for example, Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*; and Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds. *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

[3] In portraying Europe, as well as India and the Middle East, as a stage for colonial encounters, I am conflicting with existing analyses that identify "contact zones" as only being found in the colonies, not the imperial capital. See Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992, 6. This approach has also been critiqued in Inderpal Grewal. *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel*. London: Leicester University Press, 1996, 4.

like Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, who "forged a more autonomous agenda."[4] By identifying the problem in this way, it can be seen that social change in colonial India was not, as has often been asserted, merely a case of Western impact and Indian reaction.[5] Rather, it was the effect of cultural interaction- a two-way process- between the indigenous people and the colonial power, the 'East' and the 'West.'

It has been seen in previous chapters how the conduct of the Begam of Bhopal, her ancestors and other prominent female Indian activists in the first decades of the century often deviated from the contemporary stereotypes of Muslim women, as they were highly politicized, remarkably articulate and far from discreet in public life. As well as being well-versed in current affairs and eager to learn, they were also determined to initiate advancement for their community by taking example both from earlier Islamic history and European society. This desire led certain women, including Sultan Jahan Begam, to seek contact with foreigners and their ideas, and, ultimately, to travel out of India. Yet foreign influence, like other motivations for reform, did not result in an abandonment of traditional values. As will be seen, Muslim women of this era, even if they travelled abroad, continued to remain firmly within the bounds of Islamic tradition, building on cultural norms, rather than challenging them directly. For this reason, both their journeys and their reforms were widely accepted by the general Muslim community.

Indian Participation in the Culture of Travel

Travel, as it was understood in the early twentieth century, normally referred to an educational process, i.e. an activity with the purpose of observation and/or exchange of ideas. Such an idea emerged from the writings of Romantic philosophers, the most prominent being Rousseau, who constructed a new notion of 'freedom' as mobility. Travel was not only a right, but an essential aspect of the search for the 'noble savage,' the 'other,' which would complete the unalienated 'self.'[6] The universalizing of this notion of travel has had a distortive effect on history in that it has concealed other forms of movement such as migration, indenture and slavery, which were common among lower classes of Indians. As Rozina Visram documents in her important study, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, Indians, primarily

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[4] Metcalf, "Reading and Writing," 3.
[5] Minault critiques this pattern of interpretation in the introduction to *Secluded Scholars*, 3-4.
[6] Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 137.

Muslims, have been in Britain in the capacity of servants, sailors and labourers, since the early eighteenth century.[7] However, it was not until the late nineteenth century that significant numbers of upper-class Indians began overcoming religious and cultural taboos about travel and crossing the 'black waters' in the terms to be discussed in this chapter.[8]

Native princes, like the Begam of Bhopal, began visiting Europe and Great Britain for both personal and political reasons around the turn of the century. Due to the fascination of the British public, the activities of these colourful figures were regularly documented in the society pages of London newspapers.[9] Less well-documented, though more relevant to this discussion, was the increased mobility of certain *sharif* Muslims, like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who travelled with the aim of discovering new ways to reform their community. During his eighteen month stay in Great Britain, from April, 1869 to October, 1870, he visited many important educational institutions, including Eton, Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge, as well as studying Western society in general. His observations resulted in a dramatic change in his way of thinking. Though he had arrived in England full of confidence in Indian culture, he was now overcome by the superiority of Western learning and civilization. In an infamous letter to the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, he summarized his new position, stating, "I can truly say that the natives of India, high and low, merchants and petty shopkeepers, educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education, manners and uprightness are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man."[10] Travel had not, however, shaken his faith in the basic aspects of the Islamic religion. While in England, he also wrote a response to William Muir's *Life of Mahomet*, entitled *Khutabat-i-Ahmadiya*, in which he staunchly defended the Prophet from the attacks of Christian missionaries.[11]

From the 1860s, several other Muslim reformers also began travelling to Britain, often for the purpose of legal studies at the Inns of Court in London. Primary amongst them was Badruddin Tyabji, son of a prosperous Bombay merchant, who returned to India in 1867 as

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[7] Rozina Visram. *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*. London: Pluto Press, 1986.

[8] Before this time, only a handful of elite Muslims had travelled to Britain for reasons of diplomacy or intellectual curiosity. See Gulfishan Khan. *Indian Muslim Perceptions of the West during the Eighteenth Century*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Oxford, 1993.

[9] See, for example, "Visiting Indian Chiefs and Notables" in *The Times* (London), 7 Jun., 1911, 7a; or the "Court Circular" column of each issue, particularly in the summer months.

[10] *Aligarh Institute Gazette* (Aligarh), 19 Nov., 1869, quoted in Rehmani Begam. *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: The Politics of an Educationalist*. Lahore Vanguard Books, 1985, 146.

[11] For a discussion of *Khutabat-i-Ahmadiya*, see K.A. Nizami. *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*. New Delhi: Government of India, 1980 (reprint), 119ff.

the first London-trained Indian Muslim barrister. Like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, his experience in Britain had convinced him of the need to assimilate Western knowledge into the Islamic religious tradition, following the Prophet's precept to "seek learning wherever it may be found." He was also inspired to advocate the spread of female education and the eradication of purdah, two aims that brought him into conflict with the Aligarh leader, as well as the bulk of the membership of the MEC.[12] His ideas were taken up, however, by later Muslim law students in Britain, notably Sayyid Karamat Husain, Sayyid 'Ali Imam, Mian Shah Din, Mian Muhammad Shafi and Sayyid Humayon Mirza, who formed the Anjuman-i-Islam in London in 1888 to debate reformist issues and organize cultural events.[13] As was seen in earlier chapters, many of these figures subsequently took practical initiatives to facilitate the emergence of Muslim women, founding girls' schools and women's organizations, and urging women of their own families to give up purdah. Evidently, contact with Britain had inspired them to seek out a tradition of reform within their own cultural milieu.

For women in India, travel was traditionally undertaken for pilgrimage or to visit relatives; as women were not expected to receive formal education, travel for the purpose of learning was unknown. However, when men, particularly of the Bengali *bhadralok*, began travelling for secular reasons, first within India, and then abroad, at the end of the nineteenth century, they were increasingly accompanied by their wives and children. Some of these women, a prominent example being Prasannamoyee Devi, a member of a highly educated and elite Bengali family, described their travels in published narratives, which, like the writings of their male contemporaries, reflected the ambition of the Bengali middle class to use notions of the past in constructing an understanding of India as a modern nation.[14] While abroad, certain other *bhadramahila*, the first being Govind Chunder Dutt's wife and daughters, also pursued educational opportunities.[15] Their example was emulated, by the 1880s, by women across India, including Anandibai Joshi, an upper-caste Hindu woman from Maharashtra, who travelled specifically to obtain further studies in the medical field. Others, most notably Pandita Ramabai, toured England and the United States in order to observe teaching methods

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[12] See speeches and proceedings of the MEC in Bombay in 1903, quoted in Husain B. Tyabji. *Badruddin Tyabji: a Biography*. Bombay: Thacker & Co., 1952, ch. 23.

[13] For more on this organization, see Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 192-197.

[14] See Kumkum Chatterjee. "Discovering India: Travel, History and Identity in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Colonial India." Paper presented at "The Place of the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia," School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 16-18 Apr., 1997.

[15] The Dutt's were an upper-caste Bengali family, who had converted to Christianity. They travelled to England in 1869. Toru Dutt, a daughter of the family, is discussed in some detail in Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 162-178.

and raise funds for their own educational institutions in India.[16]

By the turn of the century, Muslim women had also begun accompanying fathers and husbands on holidays or business trips around or out of India, providing the companionship expected from ladies in Western and reformed Indian society. The experiences of Sughra Humayon Mirza, wife of Sayyid Humayon Mirza, exemplify this development. She joined her husband on several tours of Persia, Arabia and India in the early years of twentieth century, subsequently describing her experiences in published travelogues. In these books, she focussed, in particular, on the difficulties of travelling within strict purdah, a theme that was recurrent in the writings of many Muslim women reformers, including Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain.[17] Other women, including Lady Imam 'Ali and Begam Shah Nawaz, who were unveiled, were able to use family connections to gain entrance to political organizations abroad such as the Indian Ladies' Committee and the Muslim League.[18] It was unusual, however, for Muslim women to travel with the express purpose of receiving formal education; reports mention only occasional cases of single girls receiving scholarships to study in England in the 1920s.[19] A rare exception was that of the Faizi sisters- Atiya, Zohra and Nazli- who were sent abroad to a girls' boarding school in the late nineteenth century. Their pioneering experiences were later discussed by Atiya Faizi in an account published in 1932 entitled *Zamana-i-Tahsil* [A Time of Education].[20]

For Muslim women to travel outside of India in the early twentieth century was unusual. The few exceptions, given above, only prove the rule, since their names are well-known, being the relatives of prominent politicians, and limited enough to be easily counted. Sultan Jahan Begam, as a member of this elite club, was, thus, a somewhat rare figure.

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[16] Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 53-62, 81-82.

[17] See, for example, Begam Humayon Mirza's description of her journey to Bhopal, Agra and Delhi in *Roznamchah*, 2-3. The introduction to this book also lists other travelogues that she had written on her journeys to Iraq, Bihar and Bengal, Poona and Madras. For a comparable discussion of the difficulties of travelling within purdah, see selections from Rokeya's *Avarodhbasini*, translated by Roushan Jahan, in *Sultana's Dream*, 27.

[18] Extract from the *Daily Telegraph* (London), 26 Jul., 1924; and Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter*, 102. Lady Imam 'Ali was the wife of Sir Imam 'Ali, an early Muslim Leaguer, who was also Law Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council from 1910 to 1915, a Judge of the Patna High Court in 1917, and Prime Minister to the Nizam of Hyderabad's government from 1919 to 1922. Robinson, *Separatism*, 431. Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz was the daughter of Sir Muhammad Shafi, another prominent Muslim Leaguer, who became, first Education Member in 1919, then Law Member in 1923, to the Viceroy's Executive Council, before representing the Muslim community at the Round Table Conferences in London in the 1930s. Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter*, 2-3, 39-143.

[19] The pioneering case of Mahmooda Begam, a girl from the Central Provinces, is mentioned in Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter*, 68. For further examples, see reports of the Indian Students' Department or the Education Department in London.

[20] I have not seen a copy of this book, but it is mentioned in Ali, *Emergence*, 130.

Furthermore, though she did not travel alone, being accompanied by her sons, their families and numerous state officials, she was, if not the only, one of few women of her faith who travelled out of her own conviction in her time. An examination of her journeys to Hijaz in 1903-04, Europe and the Middle East in 1911 and England in 1925-26, as well as her connections with European women in India, including Quaker missionaries, Vicereines and suffrage activists, reveals the effect of contact with 'foreign' ideas on women's activism in Bhopal. As will be seen, this contact had the greatest influence on the Begam's understanding of Islam and gender issues.

Growing Islamic Orthodoxy: Hijaz, 1903-04

In the previous section, the rarity of Indian women's overseas travel experiences was emphasized. Yet exceptional Muslim women had ventured out of India before the twentieth century, primarily for religious reasons. Unlike the Hindus, who censured all overseas travel, the Muslim community in India had long-accepted voyages for the purpose of *hajj* and trade, as is evident from the narratives of Ibn Battuta and Alberuni.[21] Such notions of travel enabled Gulbadan, aunt of the Mughal emperor Akbar, to leave India as early as 1575 on a seven year pilgrimage to Hijaz. Unfortunately, she did not write an account of this adventurous journey, despite having prepared her memoirs; the basic itinerary is only known from the writings of court historians.[22] With the growth of print culture and the emergence of more personal forms of literature in the nineteenth century, however, *hajj* accounts began to appear which documented the personal experience of the pilgrim.[23] The first of these by a woman, as well as by a princely ruler, was *A Pilgrimage to Mecca* (1870), written by Sikandar, the second ruling Begam of Bhopal, after she went on *hajj* in 1863. Reflecting the reformist milieu of the time, it detailed, not only the religious aspects of the Begam's pilgrimage, but also the reforms that she would institute, if she ruled the Hijaz, to improve the administration.[24]

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[21] See *The Travels of Ibn Battuta AD 1325-1354*. Vols. I-II. translated by H.A.R. Gibb from the French translation of Arabic text by C. Defrémery and N.N. Sanguinetti. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958-1962; Edward Sachau, ed. *Alberuni's India*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1989.

[22] See Abul Fazl. *Akbar-nama*. Vol. III. Tr. by H. Beveridge. Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1939, 569-570.

[23] For further discussion of *hajj* accounts, see M.N. Pearson. *Pious Passengers: The Hajj in Earlier Times*. London: Hurst & Company, 1993, ch. 1; and Barbara D. Metcalf. "The Pilgrimage Remembered: South Asian Accounts of the *Hajj*" in Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, eds. *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination*. London: Routledge, 1990, 85-107.

[24] Sikandar Begam. *A Pilgrimage to Mecca*. Tr. by Mrs. Willoughby-Osborne. London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1870, esp. 140-141.

Inspired by this document, Sultan Jahan Begam followed in her grandmother's footsteps in 1903-04, initiating a life-time of travel by making a five and a half month journey to the Muslim holy land. Though the Begam's decision to travel to Hijaz was undoubtedly due to a heart-felt desire to complete the *hajj*, it was a practical choice of destinations for her first excursion out of India, since it could clearly be justified on the grounds of religious injunctions.[25] Nevertheless, the expedition remained extremely perilous. The prevalence of fatal illnesses, armed bandits, tribal wars, corrupt officials and transportation mishaps meant that many *hajjis* did not return. These circumstances were exacerbated, to a large degree, by the political situation in the Ottoman Empire; under the despotic leadership of Sultan 'Abdul Hamid, the Turkish government showed more interest in suppressing the liberal influence of the Young Ottomans, than any criminal activities.[26] The Begam's travelling party experienced the effects of this anarchic situation when they were harassed by Bedouins in the desert between Yembu and Medina, apparently at the behest of the Shaikh of Mecca, who sought to make a great profit from their visit. When they refused to pay his price, he marred their journey further by making accusations that they had fraternized with enemies of the Sultan, given offense to the *mazawar* (religious guide) of the family and distributed an insufficient amount of charity to the local people. Like her grandmother, Sultan Jahan Begam reported these incidents, as well as the religious elements of the *hajj*, in a detailed travel account, entitled *The Story of a Pilgrimage to Hijaz*.[27]

In a recent article, Barbara Metcalf has explored how *hajj* accounts, by purporting to describe an objective reality, in fact, reflect the implicit political perspectives or religious orientations of their authors. She provides the example of Mirza 'Irfan 'Ali Baig, a distinguished civil servant and member of the Anjuman-i-Islamiyya, who, by showing concern with a specific communal group, the 'Indian Muslims,' revealed his identification with the

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[25] According to the Qur'an, the *hajj* is one of the principle article of the Islamic faith, along with the proclamation of the creed, prayer, fasting and charity, and must be completed by every Muslim once in their lifetime, if it can be afforded. The ritual of the pilgrimage includes various aspects, including cropping of the hair, wearing unsewn clothes, offering sacrifice, visiting Arafat and other sacred sites, and circumambulating the Ka'aba in Mecca, the holiest shrine of Islam. Special rules for women assert that they must not wear cosmetics, excessive ornamentation or elaborate clothing, nor cover their faces with a veil. Many pilgrims not only complete the basic rites, but also visit other mosques and holy places in Mecca, Medina and elsewhere in the Middle East. For the benefit of non-Muslim readers, these elements of the pilgrimage were elucidated by Sultan Jahan Begam in a separate introductory section to *The Story of a Pilgrimage to Hijaz*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1909, 19-127.

[26] See Edib, *Memoirs*, 238-260.

[27] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hijaz*, esp. 242-258, 318-332.

imperial power.[28] In Sultan Jahan Begam's account, a similar political perspective is seen in that she also identifies herself closely with the British. As with political activities in India, however, pragmatism appears to be the primary motivation behind this loyal orientation. When faced with the "unpleasant" situation detailed above, for instance, she describes how she reminded local officers of Bhopal's service to the empire in order to elicit their help in arranging transportation, a medical escort and a military guard. Subsequently, she details how she also used her close connections with the imperial power to convince the Turkish government to give her the protection of the Sultan and a respectable reception, suggesting that her kind treatment could "cement" friendly relations between the two powers.[29] This careful manoeuvring of the influential political forces enabled her to remove the threat of the Bedouins and the Shaikh and guarantee that her journey was safe, comfortable and dignified.

More explicit in Sultan Jahan Begam's *hajj* account than her political allegiance is her religious identification with traditional Muslim law-makers. In the introduction, she writes of the importance of the *hajj* in teaching Muslims of their equality, since men and women, "the poor and the rich, the beggar and the sovereign," all approach the Ka'aba as "[God's] servants."[30] Yet she states explicitly here, as she does elsewhere in her speeches and writings, that all may be alike before God, but socio-economic and gender differences are perfectly acceptable on earth. Not only does she praise the Turkish government for giving her "a reception befitting [her] rank,"[31] but she also remarks that she was rightly provided with a prayer area apart from other 'lesser' women at the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. With regard to gender distinctions, she was so meticulous about keeping herself in strict seclusion, either behind a veil or a screen, that she was willing to forgo her first opportunity to enter the above-mentioned mosque along with her son and other male relatives, since "proper purdah arrangements could not be made at such short notice."[32] In fact, she did not even question the prejudice, when the Shaikh of Medina informed her that under no circumstances could women visit the grave of the Prophet.[33] Being a firm believer in hierarchies, particularly those advocated by Islam, the Begam never doubted that she required special treatment due to her

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[28] Metcalf, "The Pilgrimage Remembered," 89-90.
[29] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hijaz*, 242-258, 318-332. This episode was also discussed in Sultan Jahan Begam to L. Impey, PA, 10 Jul., 1904; Dr. Mahomed Husain, Vice-Consul, Jeddah to G.P. Devey, Consul, Jeddah, 8 Jan., 1904; and "Extract from the Haj Report for the Year 1903-1904," in NAI(ND), GOI, FD, Dec., 1904, Nos. 40-54.
[30] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hijaz*, 6.
[31] *Ibid.*, 11.
[32] *Ibid.*, 266.
[33] *Ibid.*, 267.

princely rank, yet held a distinctly different and somewhat inferior status as a woman. This view was in contrast to that of her grandmother, Sikandar Begam, who, in her *hajj* account, showed no recognition that the respect granted to her as a result of her princely status ought to have been tempered by concerns of gender.[34]

It appears that, just as Mirza 'Irfan 'Ali Beg's definition of 'Indian Muslim' was altered by his experiences on *hajj*,[35] so was Sultan Jahan Begam's understanding of Islam. Undoubtedly, this was because the journey, by taking her to Arabia, brought her into contact with certain aspects of Islam not usually practiced in the Indian sub-continent. Before her initial excursion abroad, the Begam had already proven herself to be a steadfast Sunni Muslim. But she had also displayed the effects of having been raised in the heterogeneous Indian environment; she regularly encountered members of other Indian(ized) faiths, showed herself to be open to discussion on religious issues and even took part in the festivals of other communities. Though she continued a policy of toleration of non-Muslims after her return from pilgrimage, she increasingly modeled her religious practice on scriptural, rather than customary, Islam, and showed only spasmodic interest in other faiths. The explicit nature of this change was documented by Louisa Walker, a Quaker missionary who spent many years in Bhopal, and had close relations with the ruling family. She explained to Friends in England in 1921 that the Begam of Bhopal had shown a lively interest in Christian religious texts and worship in the early years of her reign. After her visit to Mecca, however, she had become "a much more ardent follower of the Prophet" and "much more zealous in her own religion."[36]

The Begam's growing orthodoxy was also reflected in her active attempts to promote the Muslim religion. Vast sums were donated to the Hajj Committees in Bombay and Central India to enable poor Muslims to complete the pilgrimage successfully, while mosques were financed throughout India and the Middle East.[37] She also initiated Muslim missionary endeavours outside of India, as will be seen in the following section. Similar endowments were not made to other religious communities; when the Maharaja of Alwar, a fellow member of the Chiefs' Conference, requested her to subscribe to the building of a new temple at the

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[34] Sikandar Begam, *Pilgrimage*, esp. 38-50.
[35] Metcalf, "The Pilgrimage Remembered," 90.
[36] Louisa Walker to H.T. Silcock, 5 Feb., 1921, FSC/IN/3.
[37] See, for example, Foreign Department Notification, 28 Aug., 1908, NAI(ND), GOI, Oct., 1908, Nos. 78-79; Bosanquet, AGG, to Wood, PS, 27 Jan., 1914, NAI(ND), GOI, Mar., 1914, Nos. 31-32; and "Report on the subject of the administration of the "Robats" or hostels maintained in the Holy Places of the Hedjaz by certain Muhammadan States and Individuals," NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 186, 1920.

Mayo College in Ajmer in 1919, the Begam emphatically refused on the basis that her religion prevented her from supporting any idolatrous venture.[38] Evidently, the comment of Miss Fitzroy, Private Secretary to Lady Reading, in her diary in 1922 that the Begam had become "increasingly fanatical" did not merely reflect the change in British perceptions following the Khilafat movement, but also the transformation of her religious views.[39] Sultan Jahan Begam, like many *hajjis* before her, had been inspired by her journey to Mecca to new levels of Islamic orthodoxy.

Questioning Islamic Orthodoxy:England, 1911 and 1925-26

In the above-quoted letter, Louisa Walker noted that the Begam of Bhopal's attitudes were altered, not only by her journey to the Hijaz in 1903-04, but also by her travels in England and Europe in 1911. This second trip abroad, ostensibly to attend the coronation of the King-Emperor and Queen-Empress, George V and Mary, and to take her son for heart treatment at a health spa, was a more exceptional, though safer journey for a Muslim queen. Joining the various other Indian princes who were 'summering' in London, the Begam became actively involved in the social life, waiting on the new royals and friends from India, as well as visiting tourist spots such as the Festival of Empire and Mme. Tussaud's Exhibition.[40] Her attention was also drawn to the neglected mosque at Woking, Surrey, just outside of London, which had been founded in 1889 by the Hungarian orientalist, Dr. Leitner, to serve the local Muslim population. Built and maintained through the patronage of the Begam's mother, Shah Jahan, after whom it was named, it thrived until the death of Dr. Leitner in 1899, at which time it was virtually abandoned.[41] Upon her return to India, Sultan Jahan Begam sought to resuscitate the mosque and its surrounding Muslim community by calling on Khwaja Kamaluddin, a member of the controversial proselytizing sect, the Ahmadis, to emigrate to England in 1912 and form a mission at Woking. The Begam was, thus, brought in contact through travel abroad with another form of her own religion: Ahmadiyyat.

During the war years, Sultan Jahan Begam established herself as the primary benefactor of the Woking Muslim Mission. As well as providing financial backing for mission activities, she also wrote extensively, primarily on gender relations in Islam, for Kamaluddin's

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[38] Sultan Jahan Begam to Jey Singhji of Alwar, 29 Mar., 1919, NAI(B), BSR No. 1 (B. 57), 1919.
[39] Loose papers of the diary of Miss Fitzroy, 18 Feb., 1923, IOL, Fitzroy Collection, MSS.Eur.E.318/8.
[40] See the "Court Circular" column of *The Times* (London), 8 May to 15 Jul., 1911.
[41] See Alan Crosby. *A History of Woking*. Chichester: Philmore & Co., 1982, 114-116.

paper, *Islamic Review*.[42] As was suggested in the previous section, her aim in supporting the Woking Mosque in this period was not only to provide a service for Muslims in England, but also to foster conversion. Her interest in this issue is evident from the weekly reports which were sent to her in Bhopal by officials of the Mosque, detailing the numbers, names and status of new English converts.[43] Converts of the upper classes such as Lord Headley and Sir Archibald Hamilton, who were most prized by the Mission, received her special attention in the form of congratulatory telegrams, which were intended to inspire them to face the inevitable persecution of their peers.[44] The importance that the Begam played, both financially and ideologically, in encouraging English men and women to embrace Islam was openly recognized in speeches at the Mosque.[45] Her patronage of such a pursuit reflects the equality with which she viewed Western and Eastern civilization. Though she was in no doubt that 'the West' enjoyed cultural preeminence, she was equally certain that Islam was the superior religion. As such, her support of the Mission can be understood to stem from the same urge that led Sayyid Ahmad Khan to publish *Khutabat-i-Ahmadiya* upon his return from England in 1870.

In 1925-26, the Begam of Bhopal travelled to England for a second time. Her purpose was to challenge the British law of primogeniture that dictated that her eldest grandson would inherit the throne before her youngest, and only surviving son, Hamidullah Khan.(see chapter IV) During this visit, her association with the Ahmadiyya Muslim community at Woking was unequivocally confirmed, even though the Ahmadi *khalifa* in India had, since her first visit, discouraged missionaries from maintaining connections with "ordinary" Muslims.[46] The legitimacy of her succession claim was promoted by Khwaja Kamaluddin and her movements documented in *Islamic Review*.[47] She also made two visits to the mosque at Woking, during

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[42] See Sultan Jahan Begam. "Polygamy" in *Islamic Review* (Woking), 4 (May, 1916), 211-215; and "Relative Position of Man and Women in Islam" in *Islamic Review* (Woking), 4 (Jul., 1916), 300-305. Other Bhopali women also contributed articles. See Kishwar Jahan Begam. "Kindness and Sympathy to Relations" in Islamic Review (Woking), 6 (Oct.-Nov., 1918), 367-368.

[43] Innumerable letters of this type, written in 1919 and 1920 by Dost Muhammad, Woking Mosque, to Sultan Jahan Begam in Bhopal, are available in Urdu in NAI(B), BSR No. 100 (B. 56), 1919.

[44] Khwaja Nazir Ahmad, Imam of Woking Mosque, to Sultan Jahan Begam, 21 Dec., 1923, NAI(B), BSR No. 190 (B. 93), 1923-24.

[45] Speech of Marmaduke Pickthall, as quoted in letter from Dost Muhammad to Sultan Jahan Begam, n.d., NAI(B), BSR No. 100 (B. 56), 1919.

[46] In January, 1914, before the doctrinal split had occurred between the Lahori and Qadiyani sects, Nuruddin, the Ahmadi *khalifa*, had ordered Kamaluddin not to collect funds or other assistance from non-Ahmadis. Spencer Lavan. *The Ahmadiyah Movement: A History and Perspective*. Delhi: Manhohar Book Service, 1974, 126.

[47] See, for example, Khwaja Kamaluddin. "Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal and Her Succession" in *Islamic Review* (Woking), 13 (Oct.-Nov., 1925), 346-353.

which she met Kamaluddin and prominent British converts such as Lord Headley and Khalid Sheldrake. After participating in Friday prayers, she received gifts from the British Muslim Society and congratulated them for their efforts to correct the misrepresentation of Islam in 'the West,' especially with regard to women's status.[48] She also laid the foundation stone for an extension to the building and donated additional funds for the publication of Kamaluddin's upcoming book on the Prophet Muhammad, which was dedicated to her son, Hamidullah.[49]

Sultan Jahan's continued contact and support of the Ahmadis in Britain is somewhat surprising, considering that they were usually shunned by devout Muslims for their controversial beliefs; though they claimed to be Muslims, they maintained that Muhammad was not the last Prophet, instead following a late nineteenth century Punjabi oracle, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.[50] It need not, however, lead one to question the Begam's professed orthodoxy, as it can be justified on various levels. First of all, it could be interpreted as typical of the reaction of 'foreigners' in a strange land. As studies of the modern diaspora have disclosed, Indians, as well as other ethnic groups, who have migrated to 'the West,' tend to gather together for cultural and religious events, regardless of communal or sectarian identities that would divide them at 'home.'[51] This point is strengthened by the fact that there was a long tradition of cross-sectarian cooperation at Woking Mosque. From the late 1880s, the Anjuman-i-Islam, a society for Muslim students in England, had organized gatherings for 'Id at the mosque at which both Sunnis and Shi'as would pray together, each according to their own custom. Sometimes these prayers were led by the *imam* of the Turkish embassy, at other times by the *pesh imam* of the Iranian legation.[52]

Though the diaspora experience undoubtedly influenced the behaviour of Indians in Britain, then, as now, the conscious nature of the Anjuman's efforts implies that cross-sectarianism in the colonial era was, in fact, due to a more complex set of factors. The reformist orientation of these early travellers suggests that an explanation might be that they were seeking, as part of negotiations with the colonial power, to unite disparate members of the Muslim community, who were divided by religious or geographic factors, among others,

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[48] "Begum of Bhopal at Woking" in *Woking News and Mail* (Woking), 16 Oct., 1925, 2. Evidently, she was referring to articles by Khwaja Kamaluddin and Lord Headley such as "Woman in Islam" in *Islamic Review* (Woking), 2 (Mar., 1914), 156-158.

[49] Khwaja Kamaluddin. *The Ideal Prophet*. Woking: The Islamic Review Office, 1925, xxiii.

[50] For specific aspects of the Ahmadi faith, see Yohann Friedmann. *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, pt. 3.

[51] Philip Lewis. *Islamic Britain*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1994, 14.

[52] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 195-196.

under the title of 'Indian Muslim.' This aim would certainly have been valid in the late nineteenth century, when the Anjuman was founded, since, at that point, the process of negotiation with the British sovereign in India was still young. But these issues had largely been resolved by the early twentieth century, when Sultan Jahan Begam was involved with the Ahmadis in England.[53] As a result, an explanation for her patronage of this aberrant group of Muslims is better found in the light of doctrinal considerations.

From 1914, the Ahmadis were divided into two sects: the Lahoris, who understated the importance of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's role in their movement in order to emphasize their commonality with traditional Islam, and the Qadiyanis, who placed great importance on the distinctive Ahmadi view of the Prophet. It was the Lahoris who ran the mosque and mission in Woking. In their work with non-Muslims, they maintained, in opposition to the Qadiyanis, that it was essential to focus on the common aspects of all streams of Islamic thought, i.e. the pillars of Islam.[54] As such, their writings are hardly distinguishable from Sunni literature. This is evident from a comparison of the above-mentioned articles on women's rights in Islam by Sultan Jahan Begam and Khwaja Kamaluddin in *Islamic Review*; both authors sought a modernist interpretation of the relevant Qur'anic passages and advocated female education. There is no mention of the specific Ahmadi beliefs on the Prophet that would cause dispute. It is, thus, neither surprising, nor paradoxical, that Sultan Jahan Begam, like other reformist Muslims who visited Britain, including Mirza Abbas Baig and Amir 'Ali, made common cause with this group.

Nevertheless, there were instances when the Begam's devotion to foreign powers or principles seemed to overshadow her strict acceptance of Islamic doctrines. The most notable case involved her connection with the Sultan of Turkey. On her return journey to India in the autumn of 1911, the Begam called on the Sultan in Constantinople, renewing ties which had been made during her 1903 visit to Hijaz and ingratiating locals with charitable donations.[55] The Sultan and Sultana not only received Sultan Jahan Begam at their palace, but also permitted her to see the holy relics of Islam, which were housed in the imperial *tosha-khana* (treasury). As a final honour before her departure, they presented her with several sacred

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[53] See Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, ch. 1.

[54] For the doctrinal divide between Lahori and Qadiyani sects, see Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, ch. 7.

[55] As well as giving a generous donation to the victims of a fire in Constantinople, she also provided the necessary funds to revive certain religious edifices, including a seminary and a mosque. Her beneficence was reported in *The Times* (London), 7 Aug., 1911, 3f, as well as local accounts.

gifts, including a *muhn mubarak* (hair of the Prophet).[56] Yet, when the Ottoman Empire, which included the Muslim holy land, joined the Central powers in World War I, Sultan Jahan abandoned her religious brethren in favour of the British, donating recruits, artillery, food and money to the Allied war effort and exhorting Indian Muslims to do their duty to the Empire, rather than the faltering Caliph in Turkey.(see chapter IV)

As was seen in the previous chapter, she justified this stand on the basis of Islam, claiming that the British had sustained the religious practice of Indian Muslims far more than the Caliph had in Turkey. The Caliph, she asserted, was under the influence of a small group of Turks, who were "in the pay of Germany" and had "never done anything for Islam."[57] These views had been constructed, not out of convenience, but during her visit to Turkey in 1911. In her account of the journey, Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam reported that her mother-in-law had been disappointed to find that the Turkish people were not only deficient in economic and cultural matters, but also in the sphere of religion. The theologians who filled the mosques had destroyed their faith in Islam by showing more concern for "mundane" matters, than those of the laity. The Turk's "remissiveness" with regard to religion became particularly evident when looking at their womenfolk. Increasingly, Shah Bano noted, they were abandoning their traditional way of life behind the purdah for the so-called "freedom" of European dress and lifestyle.[58] Such pronouncements suggest that, while the Begam of Bhopal's attitude to certain religious questions were affected by travel and contact with non-Indians, her identity as an orthodox Muslim essentially remained unchanged. The validity of this statement is confirmed by examining her contact with Christian missionaries in Bhopal.

Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Contact with Quaker Missionaries

Though most of this chapter focusses on Europe and Arabia as the sites for cultural encounters, it was, more often than not, within India that the women of Bhopal came in contact with foreign religious ideas, particularly with regard to Christianity. This situation was, to a large degree, a corollary of the administration of Lord William Bentinck, Governor-

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[56] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Account*, vol. III, 150-151. The granting of such gifts to the Begam of Bhopal suggests that her rule had received the sanction of the Caliph, which had never been bestowed on earlier queens of Islam, including Shajarat ul-Durr in Egypt or the four Muslim queens of the Atjeh Empire in Northern Sumatra, Indonesia. See Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens*, 27, 29, 110.

[57] See correspondence between Sultan Jahan Begam and government officials and copies of the Begam's pronouncements in NAI(ND) GOI, FD, Oct., 1916, Nos. 13-34.

[58] Maimuna Sultan. *A Trip to Europe*. Bhopal, 1913, 114-123. This account was also published in its original Urdu as *Siyasat-i-Sultani*. Agra: Muhammad Qadir 'Ali Khan, n.d.

General of India from 1828 to 1835, when the East India Company's earlier policy of 'non-interference' towards Indian religions was modified in favour of open evangelical activity by Christian missionaries.[59] Though divided by doctrine and methodology, these missionaries were very similar in that they were all firm supporters of the colonial power, which allowed them the opportunity to freely revile local religions, social practices and customs, and spread both Christianity and civilization to the 'heathen' of the Empire. Though they often used institutional methods such as schools and medical work, their presence in India remained firmly geared to proselytizing and gaining converts, even during famine years, when pure charity was most required. Female missionaries, including single recruits, were widely employed in all of these endeavours, but they continued to hold a subordinate position in the mission hierarchy.[60]

Significantly different was the work of the Quakers in India, formally known as the Religious Society of Friends or the Friends' Foreign Missionary Association (FFMA). Not only were they one of the few missions who made a concerted effort with the Muslim community, but they also held a faith which dictated a unique approach to class and gender hierarchies, race relations and even missionary work itself.[61] Though other missions displayed a certain reluctance to send independent women to the colonies at all until the late nineteenth century,[62] their work in India was pioneered by a single British woman named Rachel Metcalfe, who arrived alone in Benares in 1866 to run a girls' industrial school. She continued her work there, with the help of various couples and single male missionaries, until 1875, at which time the crucial decision was made to move the mission to the Narmada River Valley in Central India, an area that was essentially untouched by missionary activity. Centred in Hoshangabad, the fledgling mission quickly spread throughout the region, establishing 'meeting houses,' schools and hospitals in Sohagpur, Seoni Malwa, Itarsi and, eventually, Bhopal.[63] As was detailed in chapter II, their main projects at this latter site involved founding

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[59] See A.A. Powell. *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India*. London: Curzon Press, 1993, 80.

[60] See Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, pt. I; Brouwer, *New Women for God*; and Leslie Flemming. "A New Humanity: American Missionaries' Ideals for Women in North India, 1870-1930" in Chaudhuri and Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism*, 191-206.

[61] For an elucidation of the Quaker faith, especially with regard to women, see Margaret Hope. *Mothers of Feminism- the Story of Quaker Women in America*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986.

[62] Geraldine Forbes. "In Search of the 'Pure Heathen': Missionary Women in Nineteenth Century India," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21, 17 (1986), WS 2.

[63] For the early history of the Quakers in India, and especially Rachel Metcalfe, see John Ormerod Greenwood. *Quaker Encounters: Whispers of Truth*. Vol. III. York: William Sessions Ltd, 1978, 14-23; and "Rachel Metcalfe," *Annual Monitor* (London, 1890), 101-115.

two girls' schools and visiting secluded Muslim women, although they also established a boys' school, maintained a reading room and held services for the native Christian community.

Though Quaker missionaries generally did not actively seek converts, and were anyway not permitted by the ruling Begam to make proselytizing their exclusive aim, they naturally hoped that their students in both zenanas and schools would be 'lead to Christ' during their education. More vigorous attempts at evangelism were also made during camping tours of rural Bhopal, which continued from 1903 to 1926. Missionaries reported that their magic-lantern shows and Gospel story-telling sessions were often attended by large crowds of women, as well as men, with whom they shared both "the love of God" and practical health information such as the benefits of vaccination.[64] They were also invited for meals and gatherings at the homes of prominent villagers, where issues of religious difference became topics of lively conversation and debate. A tract written in 1913 by Priscilla Fowler, a prominent female missionary in Bhopal, confirmed that the Quakers approached these discussions with sympathy and understanding. Though she spoke vehemently against the religious sanction of polygamy, she admitted that Islam had emerged as a result of some attractive principles, including simplicity and social equality, and demanded that proselytizing activities be coupled with educational opportunities.[65] This sensitive treatment of a local religious group contrasted with the salient view, as articulated at the 'Missions to Muslims' Conference in Lucknow in January, 1911, that every effort be made to eradicate the "great evils of Mohammedanism."[66]

Though the Friends were frequently welcomed by locals, especially when they wore local dress, there were also numerous instances when individuals or crowds either ran away, acted overly suspicious or else were openly hostile. In the early years, most of these reactions were often due to a simple fear of the unknown. One group of villagers fled from a meeting gathered by Louisa Walker and Ellen Nainby, two long-standing female missionaries in the state, when rumours spread that the women intended to take them prisoners. Though the act was obviously not physically feasible, the villagers had never encountered such a strange sight as "two English Miss Sahibs, with hats like men" and anything seemed possible.[67] Other

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[64] A.P. Fowler. "Give Ye Them to Eat," *Our Missions* (London), 10 (May, 1903), 82-83.
[65] A. Priscilla Fowler. "The Balkan War and the Muhammadan Problem" in *Friends' Quarterly Examiner* (London), 47 (1913), 48-51.
[66] See, for example, Mrs. McClure. "Social Hindrances" in Von Sommer and Zwemer, *Daylight*, 94.
[67] Fowler, "Give Ye Them to Eat," 83.

responses were more specifically directed against the race and religion of the colonial government, especially after the Khilafat agitation and Satyagraha movement of the early 1920s. In 1926, Geoffrey Maw, a prominent male missionary in the region, reported that he and his associates, though dressed as *sadhus*, were bombarded with obscenities while preaching in the town of Sironj; one young man even approached him to say, "Every time I see you people it makes me so angry that I want to murder you."[68] An earlier warning from the colonial authorities to missionaries throughout India, informing them that Muslims were no longer well-disposed to 'foreigners' and would create trouble for them, suggests that this reaction was widespread.[69]

Many Muslim women of Bhopal also reacted vehemently to Christianity when discussing religion with their Quaker instructors. Though the children tended to be simply awed by the stories of their European mistresses, their mothers and grandmothers often responded to the Gospels with a defence from their own tradition. Particularly, they countered Christian tales of Jesus the Messiah with Quranic descriptions of Jesus the Prophet, echoing intellectual debates between Christians and Muslims as they had occurred in India since medieval times.[70] Louisa Walker gave an example of a home in Sehore, where the elderly grandmother constantly interrupted her Bible lessons with the many children of the household to tell a corresponding story from one of the Islamic law-books, confirming that at least some women of Bhopal were knowledgeable enough about their own religion to defend it.[71] Other Muslim girls, who were less acquainted with Christianity, simply reacted with surprise to "the thought of God loving all men, even the Hindu, 'who makes and worships idols!'"[72] Still less educated women, who were unfamiliar with even their own scriptures, simply pleaded with their pious visitors for knowledge of the afterlife, rather than questioning the difference in religious tenets.[73] Their reaction was in keeping with that of poor and uneducated women across the sub-continent, who came in contact with Christianity through other missionary groups, like the American Methodist Mission.[74]

Though she supported their institutional work and tolerated their limited proselytizing,

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[68] Circular Letter of G. Maw, 28 Apr., 1926, FSC/IN/4.
[69] Quoted in *ibid.*
[70] See Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, 32-33.
[71] Louisa Walker. "In the Zenanas," *Workers at Home and Abroad* (London), 9 (May, 1914), 68.
[72] Journal Letter No. 6 of S. Katherine Taylor, 12 Mar., 1929, FSC/IN/5.
[73] A.P. Fowler. "The Spiritual Need of Moslems" in *The Friend* (London), 59 (27 June, 1919), supplement.
[74] See Jayawardena, *The WhiteWoman's Other Burden*, 36.

Sultan Jahan Begam personally reacted to the religion of the Quaker missionaries in a similar manner to her subjects: with occasional sympathy, but more often suspicion. In a letter describing evangelical efforts in the state, Louisa Walker commented that the Begam was, initially, very interested in the Quaker's faith, making repeated enquiries about the Gospels and their means of worship, until they felt she was "almost persuaded."[75] She was not, however, to become another Begam Samru.[76] As was seen above, after completing the *hajj* in 1903,she became increasingly devout, showing only spasmodic interest in other religions and becoming more defensive about Islam. When the deputation of the FFMA to India came to pay their respects in 1909, they noted that the Begam insisted on "[quoting] the Koran as helping her in her life every time any part of the Bible was touched upon. It seemed as though she looked upon our visit as possibly having an ulterior motive..."[77] This attitude was maintained throughout most of her reign. Nevertheless, while discussing prayer with her close friend, Mrs. Taylor, in 1928, she admitted, "I cannot address Allah as Father as I know you can, it must be very comforting."[78]

The sensitivity with which the Begam approached her friend's faith reflected, not only the cross-communal collaboration that was occuring in the Indian women's movement in the late 1920s, but also the personal regard and even fondness that she felt for the female missionaries who visited her. This respect was also expressed by other women in Bhopal, including girls in Quaker schools and women in the zenanas, who awarded the Friends' kindness and consistency with warm friendships over long periods, just as was done by Turkish girls, including Halidé Edib, who were taught by missionaries at the American College for Girls in Constantinople.[79] Even the cantankerous old woman mentioned above, who lectured the missionaries on Islam, shed tears when Miss Walker was transferred to another station, telling her, "All my old friends are gone, and now you are leaving, and there will be no one to care about us."[80] Yet the Christian religion essentially remained a matter of conversation and debate. Though the Quakers in Bhopal reported that there was a steady stream of interest, there were in fact very few converts; from 1911 to 1921, the native

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[75] Walker to Silcock, 5 Feb., 1921, FSC/IN/3.
[76] Begam Samru was the *jagirdar* of Sardhana, a small estate near Meerut. She made a high profile conversion from Islam to Catholicism in 1781, after the death of her husband, a mercenary soldier from Luxembourg. See Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, 85-87.
[77] Diary of William Wilson, 10 Feb., 1909, FSC/IN/1.
[78] Journal letter No. 4 of S.K. Taylor, 11 Nov., 1928, FSC/IN/4.
[79] See Edib, *Memoirs*, 197-198.
[80] Walker, "In the Zenanas," 68.

Christian population increased by only fifty-nine people.[81] This statistic confirms that, though contact with European missionaries was friendly, it did not influence Bhopali women to initiate a substantial modification in their religious identity.

Female Emancipation and Reactions to 'the West': Europe and the Middle East, 1911

Emphasis has been placed in the above sections on how contact with the Hijaz, Europe and Quaker missionaries affected Bhopali women's approach to religious issues. For the Begam of Bhopal, however, travel was more often initiated for the purpose of furthering Indian women's emancipation. She made this point explicitly in a farewell address at the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club in Bhopal on the eve of her first journey to Europe:

> [I expect that] this journey [will] afford me a great deal of help in the realization of my chief object- I mean the education and advancement of women. The observation of countries where women are on the same level with men in respect of education and refinement will no doubt yield a great deal of general knowledge which may be made to benefit this country to a great extent.

Her faith in the liberating effects of British culture is evident from her final invocation: "may those sailors live long who are trying to take us all from the island of ignorance to the land of knowledge and refinement."[82] As expected, the principal changes that emerged out of the Begam's travels, both to 'the West' and within India, were related to her views on women's status, but perhaps not in the way anticipated. An examination of the Begam's writings, speeches and activities before and after her tours of England and Europe in 1911 and 1925-26 exposes the distinct modification in both her statements and her practical efforts for the emancipation of the women of India.

Before her first expedition to England, Sultan Jahan Begam had always shown, not only the greatest respect for the British visitors to her State, but also a distinct admiration of the education, poise and accomplishments of their female companions.[83] After observing these foreign ladies, as well as their lower-class kinswomen, in their own environment, however, the ruling Begam seemed to experience a change of heart such that she no longer hankered after advancement for Indian women as had been achieved in 'the West.' She was notably impressed by the extent of female education and the training of children, practices which led,

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[81] Luard, *Census of India, 1921*, 27.

[82] "English translation of a speech delivered by Her Highness in the Ladies' Club, Bhopal, when leaving India for Europe" in *Decennial Report*, 81-84.

[83] See, for example, Sultan Jahan to Mrs. Ranken, wife of Colonel George Patrick Ranken, 15 Feb., 1906, IOL, Ranken Collection, MSS.Eur.F.182.

in her opinion, to the creation of "polite, free-thinking, patriotic, civilized, high-minded and sympathizing" citizens.[84] But the lack of purdah observance severely challenged her admiration of European culture. It is worth quoting at length her speech to the Ladies' Club upon her return, late in 1911, to illustrate this point:

> In spite of their education I am not in favour of the freedom enjoyed by women of the West where it has passed certain well-defined lines... It is possible that the liberty enjoyed by the women of Europe is suited to the conditions prevailing there; or that it is permitted by the teachings of the Christian Faith, but for Indian, and especially Muslim ladies, I think such freedom can, under no circumstances, and at no time, be proper... Musalman women should never hanker after greater freedom than has been granted them by their religion; a freedom, which, while permitting them the fullest enjoyments of their rights, also shields them against all manner of evil.[85]

She encouraged Indian Muslim women to be selective in their approach to European customs, acting on the Arab saying, "Pick up what is good and leave away what is evil." She begged her audience not to follow the example of Turkish women, who had adopted from their European neighbours, not only an interest in education, but also the 'evil' of unlimited freedom, abandoning Islamic injunctions and "tarnishing" their honour.[86]

In criticizing the behaviour of Turkish women, Sultan Jahan Begam was evidently placing herself in opposition to the Westernization program that had been initiated in Turkey following the constitutional revolution of 1908. Under the direction of the Young Turks, the Ottoman Empire had been infused with both the political and economic mechanisms and the social aspects of European culture. This process signified a major change in the status of women. They were urged, not only to receive an education, but also to abandon the veil, enter the professions and demand the vote. In opposition to customary family law, polygamy and arranged marriages were also discouraged. Reformers such as Halil Hamit and Celal Nuri justified these radical reforms on the basis that they were in accordance with scriptural Islam that had been cleansed of local custom.[87] To the Begam of Bhopal, however, who was firmly rooted in indigenous practice, such revisionism appeared only as slavish imitation of 'the West.' It was to be strongly deplored.

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[84] "English translation of a speech delivered by Her Highness the Nawab Begam of Bhopal, in the Ladies' Club, on 29 January, 1912" in *Decennial Report*, 157.

[85] Quoted in Sultan Jahan Begam, *Al-Hijab*, 4. Similar arguments are now being repeated as part of the contemporary discourse on women's rights in Muslim countries, under the description of 'Islamic feminism.' Muslim women such as Dr. Riffat Hassan in Pakistan and Aminah al-Said in Egypt interpret the laws of Islam as giving a woman all the rights of a man, while protecting her from certain liabilities.

[86] "Speech delivered by Her Highness in the Ladies' Club, on 29 January, 1912" in *Decennial Report*, 159-160.

[87] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 30-33.

The distinction that Sultan Jahan Begam made in the above writing between "good" and "evil" in European culture echoed the wider discourse on modernity in colonial India. It was, however, conceptualized in a manner quite different from that of Indian men, who identified a dichotomy between public and domestic, material and spiritual.[88] As Western women were admired for their participation in philanthropic movements, the West could not simply represent materiality to the Begam, as it did in the thinking of male nationalists. Nor could distinctions between 'inner' and 'outer' apply when Western women's success in the domestic fields of home teaching and hygiene was recognized. A similar conceptualization to that of the ruling Begam was, however, present in the travel writings of other Indian women. Parvati Athavale, for instance, a Hindu widow, who travelled to America in 1918, identified certain "good points" about the West as being of a domestic nature, including "cleanliness, neatness, home teaching [and] dignity." At the same time, she identified certain "bad points" as being of a public nature, including "love" marriages and employment of women outside of the home.[89]

Significantly, the Begam's response to Western culture was similar to that of Zeyneb Hanoum, a Turkish writer and aristocrat, who lived in Europe between 1906 and 1912 after fleeing the despotic regime of Sultan 'Abdul Hamid. As a young woman in Turkey, she and her sister, Melek, had been the subject of Pierre Loti's *Les Désenchantées*, which highlighted the desire of secluded Turkish women for solid education, freedom and the abandonment of the veil.[90] Yet her extended contact with Western culture led her to question this desire for freedom. As she wrote to an English friend in 1908, "I wonder, when the Englishwomen have really won their vote and the right to exercise all the tiring professions of men, what will they have gained? Their faces will be a little sadder, a little more weary, and they will have become wholly disillusioned."[91] Her reaction, as well as that of the Begam, contrasted sharply with that of Huda Sha'rawi and Saiza Nabarawi, two prominent Egyptian feminists, who, upon their return from the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship congress in Rome in 1923, displayed their solidarity with European women by publicly removed their veils.[92]

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[88] For discussion of this dichotomy, see Chatterjee. "Nationalist Resolution," 233-253; and Malhotra, *Pativratas & Kupattis*, 2-6.
[89] Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 227-229.
[90] See Pierre Loti. *Les Désenchantées: Roman des Harem Turcs Contemporains*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1906.
[91] Hanoum, *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions*, 187.
[92] Badran, *Feminists*, 92-93.

As can be seen, the Begam of Bhopal's first trip to Europe and the Middle East caused her to experience another renewal of her faith in Islam, this time relating to the status of women within the religion. Shocked by, as she saw it, the lack of propriety displayed by many English women and the resulting disrespect of their male counterparts, she began to show a new regard in her writings for the chivalrous treatment of women by the Prophet and the protection guaranteed to honourable daughters, wives and mothers in the Qur'an. Feeling that Islam had been misrepresented in the West, she sought to defend the seemingly repressive practices of her religion to her 'Western sisters' by explaining their history and continued importance to women in the contemporary age in a work entitled *Muslim Home Part I: Present to the Married Couple*. She states this purpose lucidly in the introduction: "Like many other things of Islam the Occident has given a very wrong and, I may say, false notion of the Qur'anic teachings as to the position of woman in Islam... I, however, intend to do something to the enlightenment of my sisters in the West on this subject and write [this] book..."[93] Such an aim placed her work in line with that of Muslim apologists, like Amir 'Ali and Khwaja Kamaluddin, who wrote primarily to defend Islam before a Western audience.[94]

Particularly, Sultan Jahan Begam sought to justify the institution of purdah, which she rigidly maintained, even while attending the Coronation and subsequent banquet in London. This was done in another tract addressed to both European women and Indian reformers, *Al Hijab or Why Purdah is Necessary*, discussed in chapter I, which included quotations from the Islamic tradition and Western sources. She chastised supporters of the movement against purdah for aping European manners and customs without thorough consideration of the consequences, arguing that not all customs of the civilised nations were respectable and not all of the so-called savages were barbaric. While she admitted that colonial power was "superior to us [i.e. Indians] in wealth and culture, knowledge and justice and many other noble virtues and good qualities," she stated that the free intercourse of the sexes and non-observance of purdah was a "blot on the escutcheon of Western civilisation."[95] Pre-empting the later writings of Syed Abul A'la Maududi, the Begam defended her pro-purdah stance by quoting popular Western writings, including articles in European and American magazines, which told of the degraded moral character in those societies resulting from the increased

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[93] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Muslim Home*, i.
[94] See, for example, Kamaluddin, *The Ideal Prophet*; and Ali, *Spirit of Islam*.
[95] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Al-Hijab*, 131.

public role of women. Typical of these quotations was the following passage from an article by Dr. Russel Webb in *Islamic Review*: "take up the newspapers and see the records of divorces, social scandals, and marital woes that fill us with shame and disgust and then tell me that these... laws and customs are good things."[96]

The Begam of Bhopal was renowned, both at home and abroad, for her bold statements on women's issues, yet her negative reaction to the freedom of the Western women she observed during her 1911 voyage, suggests that her Muslim sensibilities overshadowed her efforts for female emancipation. Though her approach to the Qur'an was certainly innovative for her time, her commitment to certain accepted interpretations effectively curtailed her program for Muslim women by limiting it to nominal reform within the boundaries of the Islamic tradition. Women were recognized as equal to men on a religious and moral plane, but required to accept a separate and subservient role in social, political and economic spheres. By remaining in the home and accepting the authority of her husband, a woman could guarantee that she was, not only shielded from assaults to her honour, but also content, since, as Sultan Jahan stated in the conclusion to *Al-Hijab*, a woman gains more pleasure from caring for her family than anything else. She should never hope for liberty like that displayed by the women of Europe, since it brings only misery, frustration and moral degradation.[97] Such faith in the superiority of one's own culture is far more reminiscent of the attitudes of British women (and men) in India, than those of other Muslim social reformers, who had travelled to Britain, like Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Badruddin Tyabji.

Female Emancipation and Reactions to 'the West': The Discourse on Women's Health

As with Christianity, the women of Bhopal came in contact with foreign ideas relating to medicine and public health primarily within India. This circumstance can be attributed to the fact that, even at the low point of interventionist policy, the colonial state sought to justify its existence by advancing Western medical programs throughout the sub-continent, subordinating indigenous ideas and practices.[98] Bhopal, as a princely state, was partially sheltered from this hegemonic enterprise, as is evident from the continuance of traditional Yunani medicine in the state.(see chapter II) But the ruling Begam's interest in modernist

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[96] *Ibid.*, 148. For comparisons in Maududi, see *Purdah*, 35-64.
[97] Sultan Jahan Begam, *Al-Hijab*, 180.
[98] See David Arnold. "Public Health and Public Power: Medicine and Hegemony in Colonial India" in Engels and Marks, *Contesting Colonial Hegemony*, 131-151.

reform, as well as her close identification with British interests, meant that her subjects inevitably became involved with colonial health projects in the early twentieth century. For women, this discourse on health centred almost exclusively on reforming childbirth.

As Geraldine Forbes has pointed out, childbirth was never a topic of great concern for either British or Indian men. Rather, it was brought into the public arena by the large number of women missionaries, particularly those with medical qualifications, who came to India in the late nineteenth century.[99] Having negotiated entry into the zenana, usually by offering educational services, they described their unique experiences in mission journals and magazines.[100] By the 1880s, their disturbing depictions of the poor health conditions surrounding childbirth had convinced educated readers in Britain that bringing Western medicine to women was an essential aspect of Britain's 'civilizing mission' in India. The cause was soon after taken up by the wives of viceroys and other Indian officials. In 1885, Lady Dufferin launched the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India, an organization which intended to train female doctors, nurses and midwives and found zenana medical facilities. It was the first systematic effort to provide Western medical care for Indian women, which received official support. Subsequent Vicereines took similar initiatives: Lady Curzon established the Victoria Memorial Scholarship Fund for training *dais* in 1903, while Lady Hardinge opened a medical college for women in Delhi in 1916.[101]

The Vicereines' programs received the open patronage of both reformist Muslims and Indian princes, including Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Begams of Bhopal. Sultan Jahan Begam, in particular, was an ardent supporter. As well as setting up a *dai* training scheme in Bhopal in connection with the Victoria Memorial Scholarship Fund, she also engaged Dufferin Fund medical staff to work in female hospitals and dispensaries in the state.(see chapter II) Her participation in these schemes underlines her early interest in Western scientific methods. This interest was in sharp contrast to the open hostility displayed by Bengali and Punjabi women to European women doctors and Western medicine in the same period.[102] It also differed, however, from the reaction of participants in national women's organizations,

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[99] For details on the increase of female missionaries in India in the late nineteenth century, see Forbes, "In search of the 'pure heathen,'" WS 2-8.

[100] For an example in the Bhopali context, see Louisa Walker. "In the Zenanas," *Workers at Home and Abroad* (London), 9 (May, 1914), 68.

[101] Forbes, "Managing Midwifery," 157-160.

[102] Engels, *Beyond Purdah?*, 138-141.

including the NCWI and the AIWC, in the 1920s and 1930s. Following the lead of Vicereines and missionaries, they denigrated the methods of traditional health workers, while professing the superiority of Western medical practices.[103] The Begam's reactions, as will be seen, were more complex.

The women's suffrage movement and the poor physical performance of troops during World War I, among other factors, led to renewed British interest in childbirth and women's health in the 1920s. Following the passage of the Maternity and Child Welfare Act in 1918, women's hospitals, infant welfare centres and baby shows were organized throughout Britain.[104] In India, this interest led to the formation of the All-India League for Maternity and Child Welfare by Lady Chelmsford in 1919 and the 'Baby Week' movement by Lady Reading in 1924. Both of these initiatives intended to educate Indian women, especially of the poorer classes, about hygienic methods of childbirth, as were practised in Britain, through pamphlets and travelling exhibits. An effort was also made to train midwives and female health visitors, open maternity homes and establish infant care centres. Elite Indian women, including the royal women of Bhopal, were recruited to assist their British sisters in furthering these aims.[105]

Sultan Jahan Begam and her circle of followers in Bhopal were, as before, eager to patronize the Vicereines' health initiatives. As well as making generous donations to various fund-raising drives,[106] they also travelled throughout India to participate in conferences and other activities. The primary event in which they took part was the Maternity and Child Welfare Exhibition, which was held in Delhi in February, 1920. Organized under the auspices of Lady Chelmsford's League, the Exhibition included displays, lectures and films on maternity, childhood, domestic hygiene, sanitation, home nursing, first aid and other related topics. A baby show was also held at which generous prizes were offered to encourage involvement. The participants, ranging from Muslim politicians, like Dr. Ansari and Hakim

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[103] Forbes, "Managing Midwifery in India," 166-167; and Malhotra, *Pativratas & Kupattis*, 193.

[104] Anna Davin. "Imperialism and Motherhood" in *History Workshop Journal*, 5 (1978), 43.

[105] See *The Lady Chelmsford All India League for Maternity and Child Welfare*, a small pamphlet on the establishment of the organization. Calcutta: Superintendent Govt Printing, India, 1920, in NAI(B), BSR, Pol. Dept, No. 12 (B. 59), 1920. Also, *Memorandum by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of National Baby Week*, attached to letter from Dr. M.I. Balfour to Sultan Jahan Begam, 15 Sept., 1923, in NAI(B), BSR, Pol. Dept, No. 149 (B. 93), 1923-24.

[106] Sultan Jahan Begam, Shah Bano Begam and the "leading ladies of Bhopal State" donated substantial amounts to the League for Maternity and Infant Welfare, the 'Jewel Fund' for training health visitors and various other connected causes. The 'Lady Reading Women of India Fund' was also the object of Sultan Jahan Begam's bounty. Her generous Rs. 40,000 donation for a "Bhopal Ward" at the Lady Reading Hospital in Simla does not appear to have been matched by any other patron. See letters between the Vicereines and the women of Bhopal in NAI(B), BSR Nos. 12 (B. 59) and 15 (B. 78), 1920 and 1922.

Ajmal Khan, to titled British women, like Lady Chelmsford and Lady Hailey, not only attended these official events, but also organized private gatherings to discuss prominent women's health issues.[107] Childbirth had never had such a high profile.

The women of Bhopal were actively involved in all of these proceedings, attending engagements, giving speeches and writing articles for the souvenir volume, *Keep the Baby Well.* Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam, who had previously displayed a special interest in women's health issues by giving speeches at the Ladies' Club in Bhopal and writing short tracts,(see chapter I) had a particularly high profile at the gathering, as did her mother-in-law, the ruling Begam. A comparison of these two women's contributions to the Exhibition highlights the contestation that was arising, firstly, between early Muslim female reformers and their British patrons and, secondly, between women activists of different generations. Naturally, in this forum, both women recognized the pioneering contributions of British medical practitioners to health projects for Indian women. Yet they disagreed over the emphasis to be placed on certain issues identified by the colonial power as paramount to the discourse on women's health: Western science, childbirth and the indigenous *dai*.

In an impassioned speech, Shah Bano Begam exhorted her audience to imbibe Western science, rather than the "evil" customs of their forefathers, claiming that it was the only means by which to prevent the spread of fatal disease during childbirth. Sultan Jahan Begam, on the other hand, in a well-attended presentation, denounced colonial policy for promoting Western medicine exclusively, asserting that a combination of Yunani and Western medicine would be more acceptable to both the urban and rural Indian population. She also recommended, in opposition to both British activists and her daughter-in-law, that more emphasis be placed on the negative effects of poverty and poor living conditions on women's health, rather than just faulty birthing practices. The tendency to blame the traditional *dai*, who had treated maternity cases and other female ailments with "remarkable success" for thousands of years, was, she felt, a grave error. In direct contrast, Shah Bano Begam ascribed the prevalence of death during childbirth and high infant mortality rates to this very figure. Echoing the mantra of the *memsahibs*, she claimed, "Every one is aware of the tremendous loss of life... which can be traced to... the ministrations of ignorant *dais* whose only credentials consist in their haphazard

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[107] For an outline of events, see the program of the Maternity and Child Welfare Exhibition, the handbook of the Exhibition and invites to various 'At Homes' in NAI(B), BSR No. 12 (B. 59), 1920.

apprenticeship to their equally ignorant mothers and grandmothers."[108]

According to the young princess, the Indian nation could only be saved from degeneration if elite Indian women followed the example of the Vicereines and other British women in bringing medical relief along Western lines to the poor women of India. This portrayal of Western women as "ideals of progress and culture"[109] reflects, at least to a degree, Sayyid Ahmad Khan's analogy of 'clean Englishmen' and 'dirty Indians,' as advanced in his letters home from Britain. Evidently, her journey to Europe in 1911, as well as her contact with the British in India, had led her to identify in a similar way with Western notions of science and progress. This assertion is confirmed by looking at the young Begam's travelogue, *A Trip to Europe*, in which she regularly contrasts the "taste and cleanly ways of living" of the French and the English with the "proverbial uncleanliness" of Indians.[110] Her patron, Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam, was in agreement with many of these impressions. Yet it is evident from the ruling Begam's own contributions to the Maternity and Child Welfare Exhibition, discussed above, that, in her mind, such a strict dichotomy did not exist between Indian and British approaches to health and hygiene. This stance meant that her views, unlike those of her daughter-in-law, were clearly outside the colonial discourse on health.

Despite her unorthodoxy, the Begam of Bhopal was repeatedly called upon by the organizers of Lady Chelmsford's League, along with other reforming princesses such as the Maharani of Baroda, to encourage her fellow countrywomen to become involved in the Maternity and Child Welfare movement. She did this in several articles, reprinted throughout the 1920s, in which she urged elite, educated Indian women, like herself, to take practical measures to assist their "less fortunate sisters" by founding small schools, running dispensaries or touring poor homes to spread knowledge of sanitation and hygiene. One especially useful activity that she suggested was to establish "Schools for Mothers," as had been done in Bhopal, which would prepare women for their important role of bearing and raising strong

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[108] *Speech by Princess Maimoona Sultan Shah Bano Begam at the Maternity & Child Welfare Exhibition held at Delhi on the 23rd February 1920.* Bombay: The Guru Datt Printing Works, 1920, 1-9; and *Speech of H.H. Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal at the Maternity & Child Welfare Exhibition held at Delhi on the 23rd February 1920.* Bhopal: Sultani Press, 1920, 1-10. For the views of British activists, see M.I. Balfour and R. Young. *The Work of Medical Women in India.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929, esp. 126.

[109] Shah Bano Begam used this phrase in "An Appeal to Indian Ladies" in *Keep the Baby Well* [Souvenir of the Maternity and Child Welfare Exhibition, Delhi, 1920]. Calcutta: Superintendent Govt Printing, India, 1920, 45-52.

[110] Maimuna Sultan, *A Trip to Europe*, 39, 43, 71-72.

and healthy children.[111] This focus on women's role in regenerating the nation highlights Sultan Jahan Begam's unity of purpose, not only with early Muslim reformers, like Hali, but also with the burgeoning nationalist movement. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, it had been conceptualized in a manner that glorified women's 'natural' role as wife and mother.[112] Of course, this emphasis meant that women's philanthropic activities, as advocated by the Begam, were not intended to genuinely eradicate class and gender inequities; to do so would have been in conflict with the traditional hierarchy of Muslim social structure. Nevertheless, they proved the Begam to be exceptional in an era when most *sharif* Muslims remained dedicated to the reform of their own class.[113]

Maternity schemes had been introduced to Bhopal by the ruling Begam even before Lady Chelmsford's initiatives. Though modelled on programs in British India, they had been modified to the needs of the local population by the Begam and her female medical staff. Book-learning and lectures in English, which had made similar undertakings unsuccessful in British provinces, were replaced by practical demonstrations and lessons in Urdu. Yunani medicine, which was familiar to local women, was also introduced alongside Western knowledge.(see chapter II) Lady Reading's 'Baby Week' movement, of which the Begam of Bhopal was the first vice-president, was similarly well-received. In January, 1924, in conjunction with activities across India, two successful baby shows were held in the state: the first in Bairasia, a district headquarters, with the intention of involving women of the countryside, and the second at the Ladies' Club in Bhopal, under the direction of the Begam. This latter show, which included a lecture on hygiene and child welfare, as well the prize distribution, was attended by over eight hundred women and their babies.[114] Such a large turnout suggests that the Vicereine's initiative was not plagued by concerns of British encroachment or attracting the 'evil eye,' as it was in Bengal.[115] Undoubtedly, it had been

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[111] See, for example, Sultan Jahan Begam. "The Duty Owed by Educated Indian Women to their Countrywomen" in *Keep the Baby Well.* Calcutta: Superintendent Govt Printing, India, 1920, 11-14; and "Message to the People of India" [manuscript written for Maternity and Child Welfare in India, Jan., 1924] in NAI(B), BSR No. 149 (B. 93), 1923-24.

[112] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 95-97.

[113] See Minault, "Shaikh Abdullah," 217. A notable exception was Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in Bengal, who addressed the afflictions of less privileged women through her work with the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam. See Hossain, *Rokeya*, 193.

[114] "Report on the Baby Week in Bhopal State held during the month of January, 1924" in NAI(B), BSR No. 149 (B. 93), 1923-24.

[115] Sudha Mazumdar. *A Pattern of Life: The Memoirs of an Indian Woman.* Tr. and ed. by G. Forbes. New Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1979, 175.

made respectable through its connection with a prominent Indian reformer. This assertion gains validity if one examines the success of indigenous efforts to reform child-rearing practices in Bengal by organizations such as the Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association.[116]

An investigation of Bhopali women's participation in colonial health projects highlights the essential aspects of cultural encounters between British and Indian women, as they were fostered by travel within India. Women missionaries and the wives of colonial officials came to India eager to spread the benefits of Western medical care to poor Indian women, who were afflicted by the negative effects of traditional birthing practices. They constructed an image of the indigenous *dai* as an ignorant and filthy old crone, who was wholly responsible for the high rate of infant and maternal death during childbirth. This depiction was widely accepted by the 'new' women of progressive India, like Shah Bano Begam, who sought to identify with Western science. For the older generation, as exemplified by Sultan Jahan Begam, the issue was not so clear. Though impressed by certain aspects of Western medical care, they refused any wholesale acceptance of foreign techniques, which would infringe on indigenous practice. Once again, the Begam of Bhopal was selective in her acceptance of European customs, saving her greatest confidence for her own culture.

Female Emancipation and Reactions to 'the West': The Movement for Women's Franchise:

A second issue that stimulated discussion between local and European female activists within India was women's suffrage. It was noted in the previous chapter that the growth of the Khilafat-non-cooperation movement in the 1920s led to the decline of certain women's organizations that claimed a non-political marker, including the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference and the All-India Ladies' Association. But it did not signify an abandonment of women's issues altogether. On the contrary, many female politicians in India became active participants in the world-wide 'votes for women' movement, which had commenced in England in the late nineteenth century. The Indian campaign for women's suffrage began in earnest in December, 1917 when Sarojini Naidu led the first all-India women's delegation to discuss the issue of women's political and civic rights with Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, and Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State. Members of the delegation, including Begam Hasrat Mohani, requested that Indian women be granted the status of "people" within a self-

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[116] See Engels, *Beyond Purdah?*, 148-150.

governing nation of the British Empire.[117] This demand was similar to that being articulated as part of the reaction to colonialism by women's groups across the Muslim world, including the Egyptian Feminist Union and the Federation of Indonesian Women's Associations.[118]

At a special section of the Indian National Congress, held in Bombay in August and September, 1918, Sarojini Naidu asserted that women should be given the vote on the same qualifications as men. The radical nature of her posture is evident from the fact that, under the direction of Huda Sha'rawi, feminists in Egypt had chosen a more piecemeal approach, advocating that the vote be restricted, at least initially, to women of property or education.[119] Sarojini Naidu's stance was tempered, however, by her claim that female suffrage was necessary, not so that women could compete with men in the public sphere, but so that they could continue to fulfil their traditional functions. As she explained:

> We ask for franchise, we ask for the vote, not that we might interfere with you in your official functions, your civic duties, your public place and power, but rather that we might lay the foundation of national character in the souls of the children that we hold upon our laps, and instill them with the ideals of nationality. We want the franchise for them so that we might glorify the dirt, the degradation of civic life, that we might be able, by our own implacable ideas of moral purity, to cleanse our public life.[120]

Her appeal to tradition was evidently appreciated by her male audience; the resolution in favour of women's suffrage was passed with a seventy-five percent majority.

When the Southborough Franchise Committee toured India in 1918, petitions in favour of women's franchise were received from all sections of Indian and British society, including the Congress and the Muslim League. These petitions were signed by a long and diverse list of prominent Indian men and women, including Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, the Agha Khan, Lady Abbas 'Ali Baig, Khwaja Kamaluddin and many others. The Begam of Bhopal was approached in connection with this appeal by Mrs. Constance Mary Villiers-Stuart, organizing secretary of the Indian Women's Education Association. She appealed to the Begam to support the petition of her committee, which identified two classes of Indian women as being particularly entitled to the franchise: first, those who owned property in their own right; and, second, those who had taken a university degree. These women, she asserted,

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[117] Extract from *Stridharma* (Madras), 1 (Feb., 1918), 16. For more on this delegation, see G. Forbes. "Votes for Women: The Demand for Women's Franchise in India, 1917-37" in Vina Mazumdar, ed. *Symbols of Power: Studies in the Political Status of Women in India*. Bombay: Allied, 1979, 4-5.

[118] Badran, *Feminists*, 207-212; and Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 150-151.

[119] Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, 209.

[120] Sarojini Naidu. "Equality of the Sexes" in Grover and Arora, *Sarojini Naidu*, 58-59.

had earned the right to have a voice in the administration of the country by proving themselves to be especially competent.[121] Her appeal gained added credence from the fact that similar educational and property qualifications had been accepted as the grounds for women's suffrage in the United Kingdom earlier in the year.

Unmoved by foreign events, Sultan Jahan Begam sent an unfavourable response to this request in a lengthy letter in which she detailed why she would not support the movement for women's franchise. Essentially, she was in agreement with the two main objections which had already been advanced, i.e. that Indian women should not have the vote because of the backwardness of female education and the constraints of purdah. But her arguments, especially on purdah, were slightly more complex. The Begam explained that purdah, as it was defined in the Qur'an, was not a hindrance to women fulfilling their specific social and political duties. For this reason, she was completely in agreement with the idea that women should have a voice in the national legislature on all matters connected with the home, including education, hygiene and sanitation. However, she did not believe that women should also have a say on other public affairs, which were clearly within the sphere of male activity. As she wrote:

> I cannot persuade myself to believe that in all affairs of political life the women of India would be well advised to aspire to absolute equality with men , and carry to extreme lengths their agitation for "votes." It would be a sad day for the country when the women decide to flout their traditions, their history, and their faith, impelled by a thoughtless desire to jerry-build a new world on the ruins of the old... [You] will, I trust, pardon my quoting a famous saying of our prophet, viz, "The nation will not prosper which hands over the reins of its Government to women." The very sweetness of the nature of women is not an admirable equipment for political life...[122]

Her comments were again in agreement with those of Zeyneb Hanoum, the Turkish *désenchantée*, who, upon observing a meeting of suffragettes on a street corner in London, commented "What an insult to womanhood... to have to bandy words with this vulgar mob."[123] Evidently, both women were spurning democracy in favour of a form of petition politics like that which was later practiced by elite women of the NCWI.[124]

So as to ensure that her voice was heard, Sultan Jahan Begam forwarded the above

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[121] See letters to Lord Southborough, Chairman of the Indian Electoral Franchise Committee, from the Indian Women's Education Association and others, 12 Dec., 1918, and from Mrs. Constance Mary Villiers-Stuart, 17 Dec., 1918 in NAI(B), BSR No. 95 (B. 60), 1920.

[122] Sultan Jahan Begam to Mrs. Villiers-Stuart, 10 Apr., 1919, *ibid.*

[123] Hanoum, *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions*, 190.

[124] See Forbes, "From Purdah to Politics," 232.

letter to Lord Southborough.[125] As she was a prominent reformer and princely ruler, her unfavourable views undoubtedly had a great influence on his decision. Shortly after, it was announced that the Southborough Franchise Committee had decided that it would be "impractical" and "premature" to grant the franchise to Indian women. Most of them did not want the vote and, even if they did, implementation would be hampered by social customs such as purdah.[126] Indian suffragettes were enraged, but not beaten. In hopes of reversing the decision, Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant travelled to London to address the Joint Select Committee. The WIA and other committees on women's suffrage also organized protest meetings, passed resolutions and forwarded letters to British officials. As before, however, their activities were frustrated by conservative opinion.

In a memorandum to the government, Cornelia Sorabji, an Indian Christian, who had studied law at Oxford before returning to India to act as a pleader for women, strongly opposed granting the vote to Indian women. She echoed the writings of the ruling Begam when she asserted that to do so would be inconsistent with the history and traditions of India.[127] Seemingly in response to her advice, the British parliament decided to pass the Government of India Bill as it stood, ignoring the pro-franchise petitions of Indian women's organizations. The only recognition of their appeals was that a proviso was included that allowed provincial legislatures to add women to their electoral roll. At the encouragement of local suffragettes, this proposal was taken up almost immediately in the provinces of Bombay and Madras, as well as the princely states of Travancore, Jahalwar and Cochin. By 1930, all of the provinces of British India had given in to local opinion and extended the franchise to women, although many legislators continued to express the concern, as was earlier articulated by Sultan Jahan Begam, that the "tender" nature of women made them unsuited to participation in elections.[128]

On the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales to Bhopal in February, 1922, a new constitution was introduced to the state, which imitated, to a degree, the system of government in British India. An Executive and a Legislative Council were instituted, which consisted of appointed members from among the ruling family and the Begam's ministers. The Legislative Council also included eight members, who were to be elected from various

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[125] Sultan Jahan Begam to Lord Southborough, 10 Apr., 1919, NAI(B), BSR No. 95 (B. 60), 1920.
[126] Extract from *Stridharma* (Madras), 1 (Jul., 1919), 92.
[127] For Cornelia Sorabji's views on the franchise debate, see Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 98-99.
[128] For further discussion of the franchise debate, see Forbes, "Votes for Women," 3-23.

constituencies in the state, including the landowners, the occupancy tenants, the trading community and the residents of Bhopal city. Though it was a very modest step towards democracy, the granting of suffrage in any degree was a significant concession from one of India's most autocratic rulers.[129] Nevertheless, members of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in London were quick to request that the Begam of Bhopal extend the franchise on equal terms to the women of the state. They evidently felt that such an act was to be expected from a ruler who done so much for Indian women.[130]

They received a frosty reply in return from Qazi 'Ali Haidar Abbasi, the Political Secretary in Bhopal. He had been instructed by the Nawab Begam to inform them that the women of Bhopal would only be enfranchised on equal terms with men on the day that their "intellectual capacity," which encompassed both an interest and an insight into government, reached a stage that entitled them to their full share in the administration.[131] This argument was similar to that forwarded in the 1930s by certain suffrage activists, including Dr. Muthulaksmi Reddy, the first woman legislator, when asserting that the conditions in India were not yet right for universal suffrage to be applied.[132] It was also in keeping with Sultan Jahan Begam's earlier views on female political equality, as expressed in her theoretical writings and speeches. She maintained that Islam had constituted a hierarchical scheme of relations on earth, which confined women to a separate sphere of domestic activity. If they were to rebel against this natural order, demanding equality with men in social and political institutions, then the whole system could collapse, leading to untold unhappiness. She justified her own incongruous position as the absolute ruler of a state on the basis of divine intervention.(see chapter I) As a result, the first Indian state to fully recognize women's political rights was not Bhopal, with its history of female rule, but Mysore, which had a Westernized bureaucratic government.[133]

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[129] "Administration Report of 1922" by Qazi 'Ali Haidar Abbasi, PS, Bhopal, in NAI(ND), GOI, BPA No. 211, 1922; and "New Constitution for Bhopal State" in *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 9 Feb., 1922.

[130] Chrystal Macmillan, Vice-President of International Women's Suffrage Alliance, to Sultan Jahan Begam, 1 Mar., 1922, in NAI(B), BSR No. 47 (B. 75), 1922.

[131] Haidar Abbasi to Chrystal Macmillan, 15 Apr., 1922, in *ibid.*

[132] Forbes, "Votes for Women," 7.

[133] "Female Suffrage in Mysore," newspaper extract for 26 Mar., 1924, in IOR, Information Dept, L/1/2/5. Such an eventuality was, in fact, in keeping with later history. Women rulers, including Golda Meir in Israel, Margaret Thatcher in Britain, Sirimavo Bandaranaike in Sri Lanka and Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, have all done less then their male counterparts to emancipate their female subjects. See, for example, Anita M. Weiss. "Benazir Bhutto and the Future of Women in Pakistan," *Asian Survey*, 30 (May, 1990), 433-445.

Female Emancipation and Reactions to 'the West': England, 1925-26

While on her second sojourn in England in 1925-26, Sultan Jahan Begam again sought to further the process of female emancipation in India by gaining inspiration from Western ideas. Much had changed, however, since her first visit, for the women whom she looked to for example. During the First World War, British women of all social groups had been given the opportunity to enter the labour market, gaining social and economic status by performing 'male' tasks in factories and fields, rather than domestic service, as had previously been the case. Their political status had also been enhanced as a result of the activities of suffragettes, like M.G. Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst, who had organized radical public displays, including street-corner meetings and rallies, to protest the exclusion of women from the vote. The staid aspect of Edwardian England was giving way to a new image for women in the 'roaring twenties.'[134]

By the 1920s, the status of women in the Middle East had also changed dramatically. The Kemalist Revolution in Turkey had stimulated vigorous attempts to emancipate Muslim women from traditional Islamic customs by introducing dress reform along European lines, Western social graces and, most importantly, a new civil code, which guaranteed equal rights for women. In a rejection of Islamic 'backwardness,' this document declared polygamy and marriage by proxy as illegal, recognized women's equal rights to divorce, custody of children and inheritance, and raised the legal age of marriage for women to seventeen. In a radical move, it also accorded equality to male and female testimony in court, explicitly rejecting the Qur'anic passage, which stated that the testimonies of two women be equal to that of one man.[135] This process of modernization was subsequently followed by Reza Khan in Iran, though in a more authoritarian fashion. Rather than simply requesting women to abandon the veil and baggy trousers, as was done in Turkey, he enforced a ban on the *chadar* through legislation.[136] Though less dramatic, change was also occurring in Egypt at the instigation of female activists, like Huda Sha'rawi, who had begun to articulate distinctly feminist ideals from within the forum of the Egyptian Feminist Union from 1923.[137]

Despite these changes, much of the ruling Begam's visit was occupied, as on her

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[134] Sheila Rowbotham. *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States*. London: Viking, 1997, 67-71, 75-79.

[135] Nermin Abadan-Unat. "The Impact of Legal and Educational Reforms on Turkish Women" in Keddie and Baron, *Women in Middle Eastern History*, 179.

[136] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 67-70.

[137] See Badran, *Feminists*, 91-96.

previous journey to England, with attending public functions, including receptions at the India Office and Buckingham Palace, ceremonies at the Cenotaph at Whitehall and meetings of the Northbrook Society and the National Indian Association. Nevertheless, she did find time to take part in activities that were of special relevance to women. As on her first visit, when she had toured a London County Council School and St. Thomas' Hospital, these undertakings were largely confined to visiting female-oriented museums and schools such as the Royal School of Art Needlework with her daughter-in-law and three granddaughters. However, she also made practical efforts to help the women of Bhopal by learning skills that she felt would be useful to them, including basket-weaving, leather-work and the making of pillow lace.[138] This practical work distinguished her efforts from those of other reforming princesses, like the Maharani of Baroda, who were eager to observe and read about practices in 'the West,' so that they might write theoretical tracts on the subject, but did little to learn actual skills, which could be passed on to women in India.[139]

On a personal level, the Begam of Bhopal also made a greater effort to become acquainted with Western women and their culture; whereas formal interviews had characterized social interaction during her first visit, friendly gatherings and spontaneous activities were the norm in 1925. Her granddaughter reports that Sultan Jahan Begam regularly socialized with wives of former Indian officials, as well as a motley assortment of other women, holding soirées, often in her bedroom, taking lessons in the harp and violin, and even attending the cinema.[140] This approach resembled more closely that of Zeyneb Hanoum's sister, Melek, the second Turkish *désenchantée*, who had been eager to take part in social and cultural events after her arrival in Europe in 1906, than it did that of Zeyneb herself, with whom the Begam was earlier identified.[141] This inversion reflects the transformation that was occuring, not only in the cultural milieu in England, as was documented above, but also in the Begam's reaction to European culture. Though she would never advocate Westernization as it was being pursued in Turkey and Iran, she had begun to exhibit a more sympathetic posture to 'foreign' ideas.

Perhaps, most illustrative of Sultan Jahan Begam's changing attitude to 'the West' was her increasingly liberal attitude to contact between her female dependents and European

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[138] Lady Glover. *Famous Women Rulers of India and the East.* New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1989, 98.
[139] For comparisons in the context of Baroda, see the Maharani of Baroda and Mitra, *Position of Women*, ch. 9.
[140] Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 20/21 Oct., 1995
[141] See Hanoum, *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions*, 115.

society. Shah Bano Begam noted in her account of their first journey to Europe that, though she had travelled to Marseille, Paris, London and other cities, she had seen little more than the inside of hotels. Her powerful mother-in-law would not permit her to sightsee or attend social functions, even in a curtained vehicle or *burqa*, for fear that she would have her purdah broken by a photographer or absorb "objectionable" foreign ideas.[142] Similarly, she had not permitted Shah Bano Begam, her granddaughters or other female wards to see "Western" books, novels, magazines or films, while in Bhopal. Yet, soon after their arrival in London in 1925, Sultan Jahan Begam realized that she could not keep her young charges from the "modern world."[143] English craftspeople were hired to teach the girls wood-carving, pewter work, goldsmithing, leatherwork, chinese lacquer, music, cookery and many other skills. The Bhopali girls became friendly with their teachers and servants, accompanying them around London, by bus, Underground and bicycle, to amusement parks, cinemas, theatres and shops. Their activities, including official outings with the Begam, were all photographed freely and reported on in local newspapers, especially the tabloids, which were fascinated by the veiled queen and her lively companions.[144] Bhopal's princesses had joined the London social life, very much like women of more Westernized Indian princely houses such as Cooch Behar.[145]

Shah Bano Begam's three daughters were also enrolled as girl guides and involved in charitable events in London. Particularly, they were required to collect money for war veterans on Poppy Day, an activity which suggests the Begam's growing penchant to blend 'East' and 'West.' The girls were sent onto the streets with cans of red flowers, but wearing, to their embarrassment, an augmented uniform. Sultan Jahan considered the highland kilts and long socks that were the uniform of the poppy-sellers to be "un-Islamic" as they left bare the knees, and therefore, ordered the girls to also wear *pajamas* and a head-covering.[146] Princess Abida Sultaan, the eldest of the Begam's granddaughters, noted, in retrospect, that her grandmother's bid to provide her and her sisters with a combination of Islamic and European education, clothing and influences was actually an attempt to develop them into living symbols

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[142] Maimuna Sultan, *A Trip to Europe*, 49.

[143] These events are documented in Princess Abida Sultaan's unpublished manuscript on the history of Bhopal state, in a chapter entitled "London," 201-216.

[144] Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 21 Oct., 1995.

[145] For comparisons with the women of Cooch Behar, see Gayatri Devi. *A Princess Remembers: The Memoirs of the Maharani of Jaipur*. Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1995 (reprint), ch. 6.

[146] Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 24 Oct., 1996. The press was delighted with this show of cross-cultural mixing, as is evident from articles in major newspapers. See "5,000 pounds for British Legion- The Begam of Bhopal's Tribute" in *The Times* (London), 13 Nov., 1925, 14b.

of her ideas of reform: "It was her fervent desire [that] she should provide a girl, a woman, that was an ideal, a mixture between the West and the East, balanced..."[147] Ideas such as these, which had developed, or at least matured, during her final journey abroad, also had a definite effect on Sultan Jahan Begam's activities with the women of India upon her return; from 1926 until her death in 1930, her efforts became, not only more numerous, a factor which is not surprising considering her retirement, but also far more progressive.

Though the Begam of Bhopal had worked extensively throughout her reign for the emancipation of women, particularly through education, the attention which she had been able to give to this issue had often been restricted by her duties as the autocratic ruler of a large territory. This state of affairs had been exacerbated in the 1920s when personal problems such as the illnesses and subsequent deaths of her two elder sons had placed even greater pressures on her time. Following her return from Europe and abdication from the throne, she, thus, rejoiced in having the opportunity to revitalize her earlier endeavours, many of which had fallen into disarray without her leadership, and provide personal direction to certain new projects, both in Bhopal and elsewhere in India; as she told members of the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club in 1926, "I now intend to freely devote my whole energy to the service of my sex and devotion to God." But, as she stressed to the ladies present, these efforts were also expected to be of a new type: "Bhopal is now entering a new régime, and similarly the scope of your work should enter upon a new phase..."[148] The Western influences that she had experienced in England were to be incorporated into Bhopal's reformist program.

The most comprehensive account of the projects started by the Begam in Bhopal after her return from England is in a journal letter of Katherine Taylor, a Quaker missionary, who held a particularly close relationship with the retired queen as a result of her similar age and widowed status. As was noted in chapter II, classes and recreational activities for women and girls had occurred in the gardens of the late Shah Jahan Begam's palace since the founding of the Ladies' Club in 1909, but Mrs. Taylor commented that "since Her Highness returned from... England, work has been regulated and teachers appointed for classes."[149] Specifically, a British woman, Miss Oliphant, who had accompanied the ruling family back to Bhopal after

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[147] Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 20 Oct., 1996. This judgement is confirmed by a description of the eldest princess by Abru Begam, Secretary of the Ladies' Club, in 1926: "The Princess Abida is the garden of our national aspirations, the wholesome fruit of the Begam Mother, and the perfection of Your Highness's happiest expectations." Quoted in Zuberi, *Asr-i-Jadid*, 38.

[148] Speech to the Ladies' Club, quoted in Zuberi, *Asr-i-Jadid*, 33-34.

[149] Journal Letter No. 2 by S. Katherine Taylor, 21 Feb., 1928, FSC/IN/4.

leaving the post of governess to the children of the Maharani of Cooch Behar, organized, with the help of Shah Bano Begam, wife of the new Nawab, a pack of purdah Girl Guides. These girls, dressed, like the Begam's granddaughters on Poppy Day, in frocks, *pajamas* and stockings, provided an invaluable service to the purdah women of Bhopal, organizing and controlling various segregated events, including baby shows, *mina* bazaars and sports tournaments.[150] The Begam had also hired the wife of the Railway Engineer in Bhopal, an Irish woman doctor, to assist Bismillah Khanam, the local Muslim female Sub-assistant Surgeon, in rejuvenating the 'School for Mothers' that had been started at the Club in 1919.(see chapter II) Newly-designed courses in first aid and home nursing were offered.[151] These developments reflect the spirit of cooperation on women's issues that emerged at an international level in the late 1920s, before regional and nationalist feminisms triumphed, not only in India, but also in the Middle East, in the 1930s.[152]

In one of her last letters to Mrs. Ranken, the wife of a British army colonel, Sultan Jahan Begam mentioned that she had been assisting with, not only the above mentioned activities, which were mostly for the elite classes of women, but also charity work in poorer areas of Bhopal.[153] This referred to her first-hand assistance at Asfia Technical School, the industrial school for women, which she had founded in 1905. As was noted in chapter II, it had, over the years, fallen into decay and attendance had dropped, but, soon after her return to India, the Begam took over "direct and personal supervision" of the institution and sought to resuscitate it. Headed by Miss Oliphant and Fatima Begam, sister of Maulana Azad, it attempted to attract new students by offering improved courses on various handicrafts, including the ones which the Begam had learned in England.[154] Though Mrs. Taylor noted that these subjects were not always suitable for the women who were paid to attend, it was an effort of particular significance, since it represents one of the few concrete attempts by the Begam to directly help the less advantaged women of her state.[155] It corresponds with efforts by the Egyptian Feminist Union to lessen the distance between women of different classes by initiating social service projects at the "House of Women," the organization's headquarters

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[150] Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 24 Oct., 1995. They later adopted a more indigenous uniform, consisting of a khaki-coloured *kurta*, *pajamas* and a *dupatta* tucked into the belt.
[151] Journal Letter No. 2 of S. Katherine Taylor in Bhopal, 21 Feb., 1928, FSC/IN/4.
[152] For comparisons on the Middle East, see Badran, *Feminists*, 108-110.
[153] Sultan Jahan to Mrs. Ranken, 26 Oct., 1926, IOL, Ranken Collection, MSS.Eur.F.182.
[154] See speeches and reports quoted in Zuberi, *Asr-i-Jadid*, 44-48.
[155] Journal Letter No. 2 by S. Katherine Taylor, 21 Feb., 1928, FSC/IN/4.

in Cairo.[156] In breaching the exclusivity of Muslims of the *ashraf* class, it also relates to the Begam's increased support of Hindu women in their struggle against child marriage, an activity that brought her in conflict with Muslim male leaders.(see chapter III) Evidently, Indian Muslim women, like their contemporaries in the Middle East, were on the cusp of a new feminism that crossed the lines of class, nation and community. Due to changes in the Indian political climate, this fragile alliance lasted only until the 1930s, however, at which point a more complex set of factors was introduced to the Muslim women's movement[157]

Conclusions

The metaphor of travel reveals that the Begam of Bhopal's contact with 'foreign' ideas, both in India and abroad, had a significant effect on the construction and development of her identity- as a Muslim, a woman and an Indian- as well as altering her perception of the 'other.' Although her pilgrimage to Mecca confirmed her religious identity as an orthodox Sunni Muslim, making her more suspicious of other creeds, including Christianity, she continued to have confidence in European models of women's emancipation, constructing British women as an ideal. Her first trip to Europe in 1911 led to a renewal of her faith in the morals and social system of Islam, whether propagated by the Muslim establishment or heretical groups, like the Ahmadis. Though she remained impressed by the educational system, she reacted negatively to the freedom of women in 'the West,' placing herself outside the existing discourse on the veil, women's health and female suffrage. Her final journey abroad in 1925-26 led to a mellowing of her views, as she sought to find a median between 'East' and 'West.' She became more personally involved with British women and their society, allowing both herself and her female relatives to be open to new ways of thought. This sincere re-evaluation of her religious and political views contrasted with the reaction many other Indian women, who were, according to Inderpal Grewal, no more than moderately encouraged by contact with Europe or America to accept certain "modern" ideas and reject others.[158]

Sultan Jahan Begam's reactions to the habits and culture that she encountered on her travels out of Bhopal were subtle and complex, often defying systematized analysis.

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[156] See Badran, *Feminists*, 100-101.
[157] For a discussion of this later period, see Mirza, *Muslim Women's Role in the Pakistan Movement.*
[158] Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 15.

Sometimes she appears in line with the Aligarh 'modernists,' denigrating the indigenous cultural practices of India and offering educated English women as a model for Indian girls. On other occasions, she seems to side with the *'ulama*, grounding her arguments in the Qur'an and *hadith* and focussing on the moral purity of Muslim women. Yet the Begam seems to be mostly closely aligned with the school of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, despite their opposing reactions on visits to England. Like him, she was a deeply religious person, who did not simply mimic 'Western' ideas, but placed herself firmly within indigenous traditions of reform. Though her belief in God and the authority of the Qur'an never faltered, she questioned, like some 'Wahabis' before her, the understanding of Islam that was current among Indian Muslims, rejecting certain *hadith* and demanding a literal interpretation of Qur'anic verses. Acceptance of certain 'Western' ideas on education and science was simply an additional means to improve the conditions of Muslims on earth and to better fulfil one's duty to *Allah*.[159]

Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal was not a wholly unique figure amongst Muslim women in the early twentieth century. Yet she can be distinguished from many of her contemporaries in India and the Islamic world by the dauntless spirit that lead her to travel at her own volition to Hijaz, Britain and Europe, as well as around India. Her experiences on these journeys accent the importance for female activists of her generation of building on socially accepted norms, rather than attacking patriarchy directly. By remaining within the bounds of female respectability and emphasising her religious devotion, the Begam of Bhopal was able to influence Muslim public opinion successfully and improve incrementally the position of women in her state. In doing this, she set the stage for a new generation of reformers, led in Bhopal by Shah Bano Begam and her three daughters, who initiated even more radical steps in the movement for women's emancipation. As has been seen, these younger women differed from their predecessors in that they operated within the colonial discourse on women's rights, closely identifying with Western notions of science and progress. The process by which this change occurred is most clearly illustrated through an examination of the discourse on the veil and the legacy of reform in Bhopal state, as will be seen in the final chapter.

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[159] This comparison is based on the portrayal of Sayyid Ahmad Khan in Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, 322-323.

VI: Contesting Seclusion: Conclusions

This study has emerged, unashamedly, with a political agenda: to treat women, and particularly Muslim women, as complex historical subjects, who have been active agents in the development of their society. To confirm that they have not been limited to the static domestic roles assigned to them in popular contemporary discourse. To tell, what some feminist authors have called, 'her-story' in order to bestow value on women's historical experiences. This agenda makes important assumptions about the connections between gender and politics. Just as political structures and ideas are understood to define all aspects of life, including those within the private sphere of the family, so are power negotiations at many different levels, rather than just at the level of governments and other 'proper' political actors, understood to be inherently political. In simple terms, politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics.[1] By breaking down apparent dichotomies between public and private, this approach has allowed me, as was indicated in the introduction, to identify Muslim women's efforts, not only to participate in the Khilafat movement and other explicitly political causes, but also to write tracts, establish schools, found organizations and even travel abroad, as being part of a political emergence. It has enabled me to dissolve the boundary seemingly created by the veil and recover the Muslim female subject.

Yet it has not proved possible- nor, in fact, desirable- to refer to Muslim women without extensive reference to the veil, both as a cultural practice and as a symbol. Such an eventuality is not surprising if one considers that veiling was as contentious an issue in the early twentieth century, as it is today. To discard the veil was a dramatic act by which 'new' women across India and the Middle East could illustrate their defiance of the 'old' order. The best illustration is Huda Sha'rawi, who signalled the commencement of an organized feminist movement in Egypt when she publicly threw her veil into the sea in 1923. Other prominent examples include Latife Hanem, who appeared unveiled at her marriage to Mustapha Kemal, the Turkish president, in 1922, and Surraya, Queen of Afghanistan, who returned to her country without her veil after a visit to Europe in 1928.[2] Unveiling was not, however, simply a matter of before and after, enslaved and emancipated; Sha'rawi herself had been active in facilitating women's entry into the public sphere for twenty years before she abandoned the

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[1] For an elucidation of these themes, see Joan Wallach Scott. *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, ch. 1.

[2] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 13.

hijab.[3] Rather, it was an extended process of negotiation, which reflected wider developments, not only in the women's movement, but also in the nationalist reaction to colonialism. It was, as Ruth Frances Woodsmall identified, a "barometer" of social and political change.[4]

The protracted nature of colonialism, as well as the minority status of the Muslim community, meant that the veil was conceived of by many in India, as in Algeria during the anti-French nationalist movement, as a symbol of cultural defence. Muslim reformers, ranging from Sayyid Ahmad Khan to Syed Abul A'la Maududi, defended the maintenance of purdah on the basis that it protected the private world of religion and the family from the assault of foreign cultures. Though this view remained prevalent, it was challenged from the late nineteenth century by liberal reformers, including Badruddin Tyabji, Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali and Amir 'Ali, many of whom had received a modern education in English. Their desire was for an educated wife, who would provide a help-mate and companion, not only within the home, but also at public functions, as was expected in colonial and reformed Indian society. By the early twentieth century, certain *ashraf* women, notably the Faizi sisters, the women of the Shafi family and Begam Shaista Ikramullah, had began to fulfil these expectations, gradually reducing restrictions on their movement and appearing in public unveiled. Their experiences, as recorded in articles and autobiographies, highlight the crucial differences between Muslim women's movements in India and the Middle East. While Indian Muslim women left purdah at the encouragement or even insistence of their male relatives, their contemporaries in Egypt were primarily independent feminist activists, who were either single, like Nabawiyah Musa, or widowed, like Huda Sha'rawi. Unlike in Turkey and Iran, unveiling was never imposed as part of a formal state agenda.[5]

An examination of Bhopali women's changing position on the veil clearly illustrates the evolutionary process by which Indian Muslim women facilitated their political emergence in the early twentieth century. Sultan Jahan Begam, like her contemporaries in Bengal and UP, including Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Shaikh 'Abdullah, was, in the first half of her reign, an avowed advocate of maintaining customary purdah observance in girls' schools, zenana hospitals, ladies' clubs and special women's events. In reformist tracts, like *Al-Hijab*

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[3] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 23.
[4] Woodsmall, *Moslem Women*, 40.
[5] For accounts by Indian Muslim women of leaving purdah, see, for example, Jahan Ara Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter*, 59; and Begam Shaista S. Ikramullah, *Purdah to Parliament*, 73.

or Why Purdah is Necessary, written in the 1910s, though not published in English until the 1920s, Muslim women were encouraged to leave their homes, but only if they travelled in closed conveyances and attended strictly female functions. Though seemingly retrogressive, this early insistence on a separate female sphere not only opened up professions to women, but also spawned an autonomous Muslim women's movement at the national level, which encompassed both feminist and explicitly political activities. Pioneering women's events, including the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference, the All-India Ladies' Art Exhibition and the All-India Ladies' Association, in conjunction with female participation in the Muslim University movement, the Red Crescent Medical Mission to Turkey and the First World War, provided Bhopali women with the opportunity to take leadership roles, learn organizational skills and build an all-India network.

Nevertheless, by the 1914 meeting of the Muslim Ladies' Conference, Sultan Jahan Begam, along with Shaikh and Begam 'Abdullah, among others, was considering the feasibility of lessening purdah restrictions in India to that advocated in the *shari'at*. Such measures were proposed in private meetings and hinted at in conference speeches, although the ruling Begam, like Begam Rokeya, continued to emphasize the practical importance of maintaining strict purdah in girls' schools in her presidential speech. Only in the final years of the First World War did Bhopali women begin to speak publicly of the need to reduce purdah observance. At the All-India Ladies' Conference in Bhopal in 1918, Sultan Jahan Begam pronounced that purdah, as it was practised in India, was un-Islamic. If Indian women wore a cloak and a veil, as was done in Turkey, there was no reason why they should not be allowed to move about freely. Though controversial with traditionalists, like Abru Begam, her opinions received the outspoken support of several local women, as well as Begam Humayon Mirza of Hyderabad, both at the Bhopal gathering and at meetings of the Muslim Ladies' Conference during the war years. By the early 1920s, the new Turkish-style, or 'Khatun,' *burqa* had become popular, allowing many *ashraf* women, led by Begam Hasrat Mohani and Begam Muhammad 'Ali, to join the mass agitation in connection with the Khilafat movement. Bi Amman, mother of the 'Ali brothers, even lifted her face veil before addressing a large mixed gathering of her "sons and daughters" in the Punjab in 1921.[6]

In the late 1920s, Bhopali women came out even more strongly against the custom of

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[6] See Minault, "Purdah Politics," 254.

purdah. When the ruling family stayed in London during the succession dispute in 1925-26, Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam, Sultan Jahan Begam's favoured daughter-in-law, began removing her veil once she had left the sight of her austere mother-in-law, so that she, like her Westernized princely friends, including the Maharani of Cooch Behar, could enjoy properly the amusements of London society. These "vacations from purdah," as undertaken by elite Egyptian and Turkish women from the late nineteenth century, continued until 1928 when Shah Bano Begam gave up the practice of purdah entirely, attending public functions in India and Europe unveiled.[7] Her eldest daughter, Abida Sultaan, also rebelled against the constraining custom, refusing upon her return from her first journey to Europe in 1926 to ever wear a *burqa*, despite the threat of her grandmother's wrath. Like Begam Shah Nawaz, she was supported in this decision by her liberal-minded father, Hamidullah Khan, who explained to his mother that he did not want his three bright daughters growing up in seclusion.[8]

The elderly Begam appears to have been influenced by her family's changing views on purdah for she also began to question the institution that she had defended so forcibly throughout her life. In her presidential address to the All-India Women's Conference in 1928, she spoke in strong terms against the strict observance of purdah, blaming the custom for holding back the advance of female education in India. This new stance corresponded with opinions being articulated by her male and female contemporaries, including Shaikh 'Abdullah and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, in the late 1920s and early 1930s; while Rokeya questioned her "miserable" fortune at having been born in a "purdah country" in *Avarodhbasini*, the Shaikh rallied in favour of "the freedom of women" in a series of articles in *Tahzib un-Niswan*.[9] But the Begam of Bhopal went a step further. In 1929, just a year before her death, she abandoned the veil herself, meeting British male officials and Bhopali citizens face to face for the first time in her life. Evidently, she had realized that new times demanded a new example for her subjects. India was rapidly changing and, with it, the female population. Women now needed a more comprehensive education than was available behind the purdah.[10] This justification highlights that the Begam's seeming *volte face* on the veil was, in fact, the culmination of a long process of incremental change.

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[7] Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 20 Oct., 1995; and Woodsmall, *Moslem Women*, 59. For comparisons with the Middle East, see Badran, *Feminists*, 7-8.

[8] Personal communication of Princess Abida Sultaan, 19 Oct., 1995.

[9] See Hossain, *Sultana's Dream*, 35; and Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 128-129.

[10] Journal letter no. 7 of S. Katherine Taylor, 2 Jul., 1929, FSC/IN/5; and personal communication of Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam, quoted in Jacobson, "The Veil of Virtue," 203.

In *Majalis un-Nisa*, published in 1874, Altaf Husain Hali declared that a woman's virtues were best gauged by her son's accomplishments.[11] His assertion leads one to seek confirmation of the reformist achievements of Sultan Jahan Begam, a latter day Zubaida Khatun, in the lives of her descendants, specifically Hamidullah Khan, Maimuna Sultan and their three daughters, though also future generations of Muslim women in Bhopal. This history deserves a study in itself, but even a brief glimpse at the available sources uncovers a theme that has run throughout this study: paradox. Though Sultan Jahan Begam had raised Hamidullah Khan to be the ideal *sharif* Muslim male, displaying the qualities of loyalty, prudence, piety and diligence, he did not act, even during her lifetime, in quite the way she would have expected, as has been seen in previous chapters. Following her death, his penchant for nationalist politics, polo and pomp, all things of which the Begam had been sceptical, if not outright opposed to, was given an even freer rein. This is not to deny that Hamidullah was a progressive ruler, who made invaluable contributions, not only to the princely order, but also to the Indian nation and the British empire through his involvement in the Round Table Conferences, the Chamber of Princes and the Second World War.[12] It is only to say that many of the consequences of reform were unforseen. This is confirmed by examining the activities of Sultan Jahan Begam's female descendants.

Following the death of her overbearing mother-in-law in 1930, Shah Bano Begam, the new Begam of Bhopal, did not continue her reformist work, but effectively retired from political life, although she remained formally involved with the Indian women's movement through her acceptance of honorary titles such as patroness of the All-India Women's Conference. Her two youngest daughters, Sajida and Rabia, similarly shunned political pursuits in favour of social and cultural activities, joining, in the 1930s and 1940s, a glamorous circle of Indian princes, who occupied themselves with sports, music and dance. Only in their maturity did the two princesses uphold certain political and philanthropic traditions of Bhopal's royal women. Following her high profile marriage to Nawab Muhammad Iftikhar 'Ali Khan of Pataudi, an international cricketer, in 1939, Sajida Sultaan, for instance, emerged as an active philanthropist, patronizing causes as diverse as the Aligarh Muslim University, the Women's Hockey Association, the Jamia Millia Islamia, the Bharatiya Kala Kendra and the Ghalib Society. Upon her father's death in 1960, she was also chosen

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[11] Minault, *Voices of Silence*, 27.

[12] For sources on Hamidullah's reign, see Ali, *Bhopal*, 91-135; and Mittal, *History of Bhopal State*, ch. 3-6.

as successor to the title and privy purse of the Nawab of Bhopal on account of her elder sister's migration to Pakistan. As Begam of Bhopal, she did not seek victory on the campaign trail, like Maharani Gayatri Devi of Jaipur, but she did join the fight, as her grandmother would have done, alongside the Maharajas of Baroda and Dhrangadhara, among others, for the maintenance of princely privileges in 1970.[13]

Nevertheless, it was Abida Sultaan, the eldest daughter and proclaimed successor of Hamidullah Khan and Shah Bano Begam, who inherited, above all, the unique legacy of the Nawab Begams. Again, it was not, at least initially, in the way Sultan Jahan Begam would have intended. Following her brief marriage to Sarwar 'Ali Khan of Korwai and the birth of her son, Shaharyar Muhammad Khan, in the early 1930s, she turned her attention, not to family life or even women's issues, but to the arts of government, including military service, fulfilling the roles of Chief Secretary and President of the Cabinet in the administration of her father in the 1930s and 1940s. When the princely states were subsumed into the new Indian nation and the princes reduced to figurehead sovereigns in 1947, Abida Sultaan migrated to the newly created Pakistan, accompanied only by her young son. The new government welcomed her administrative experience, assigning her to various diplomatic missions throughout the 1950s, which took her to China, Brazil and Britain. The rapid replacement of Pakistan's democratic government by a military regime, however, caused the Princess to leave the administration and take on the new role of dissident. From the 1960s until the present, she has continued to fulfil this function in Pakistan, challenging publicly the policies of successive regimes, despite her son's rise to the top of the Pakistani foreign service. In particular, she has questioned the curtailing of women's rights in Muslim countries under the state-sponsored Islamization programs of the 1980s and 1990s, arguing, like her grandmother nearly a century before, that women are guaranteed extensive legal rights, including of a political nature, in scriptural Islam.[14]

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[13] Zaidi, *Muslim Womanhood*, 111-112; Ali, *Bhopal*, 135-140; personal communications of Rabia Sultaan, 31 Oct., 11 Nov. and 27 Nov., 1996; personal communications of Shaharyar M. Khan, 4 Jun., 1996; and Allen and Dwivedi, *Lives of the Indian Princes*, 333-335.

[14] This biographical account is based primarily on the personal communications of Princess Abida Sultaan herself, 20-29 Oct., 1995. Others sources include Moni Mohsin. "Princess Abida Sultaan: A Princess Remembers," *The Friday Times*, 13-19 May, 1993, 24; Andaleeb Nadeem. "A Princess Who Sacrificed Everything," *The Pakistan Times*, 1 Jul., 1993; Sher Ali Pataudi. *The Elite Minority Princes of India*. Lahore: Syed Mobin Mahmud & Co., 1989, 165-169, 190-192; Zuhra Karim. "Princess Abida Sultaan," *She*, Oct., 1984, 2-5; personal communications of Shaharyar M. Khan, 4 Jun., 1996; Rosita Forbes. *India of the Princes*. London: The Travel Book Club, 1939, 291-292; and Muhammad Amin Zuberi. *'Aurat aur 'Askarit*. Hyderabad: Azim Steam Press, n.d. For examples of her dissident writings, see Princess Abida Sultaan of Bhopal, "The Genesis of Pakistan," *Dawn* (Karachi),

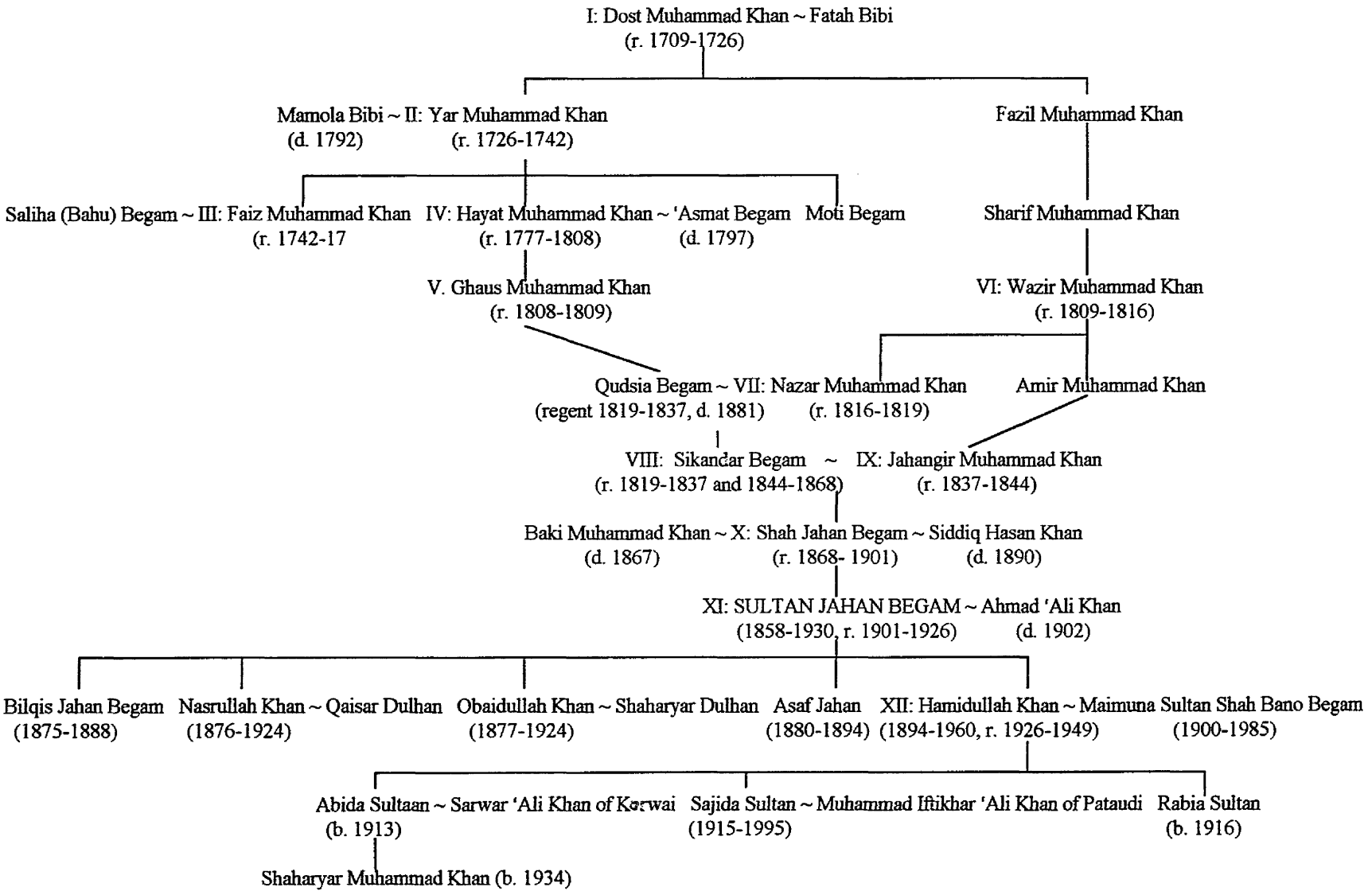
Sultan Jahan Begam's paradoxical legacy is seen, not only in her immediate relatives, but also in Muslim women of the former Bhopal state, many of whom continue to be well-educated under the watchful eye of her portrait at the Sultania Girls' School and other institutions founded during her reign. More often than not, Muslim female education is now undertaken, particularly by the elite, to a higher level with the explicit hope of entering the professions. Even descendants of the Begam, who still reside in her palace in Bhopal, have attended college, some abroad, in order to undertake teaching and administration in a school. Though the women of the former royal family do not wear the veil- beyond a fashionable *dupatta*- the observance of purdah remains a contentious issue in Bhopal, distinguishing women of different generations, classes and communities. As Doranne Jacobson has documented in her important anthropological studies of the region, a wide spectrum of customs is observed, ranging from young college girls and working women, especially in the cities, who have abandoned purdah altogether, labelling it "backward" and "ignorant," to the wives of status-conscious men, whether landowners or beggars, who remain in strict seclusion, leaving their homes only rarely in shrouded tongas to visit relatives or attend religious festivals.[15] As such, the Turkish-style *burqa*, introduced during the reign of Sultan Jahan Begam, remains a common sight in the alleyways of old Bhopal city, but the process of contesting seclusion continues.[16]

Independence Day Supplement, 14 Aug., 1984;"Women's Status," *Dawn*, 2 Jan., 1989; "On Women Being Head of State," *Dawn*, 21 Mar., 1989; "Status of Women," *Dawn*, 28 Apr., 1989; and "If I were king," *Dawn*, 31 Aug., 1993.

[15] Jacobson, *Hidden Faces*, 165-185; and "Veil of Virtue," 187-212.

[16] These observations are based on my own visits to Bhopal city and the neighbouring districts undertaken in 1995 and 1996.

Appendix I: Genealogy of the Ruling Family of Bhopal



Glossary

'alim (pl. *'ulama*)	one who possesses knowledge, particularly in Islamic legal and religious studies
anjuman	association, usually of Muslims
ashraf	noble, respectable; also those Indian Muslims who trace their lineage to the Prophet, his companions or other ruling classes outside of India
bahin	sister
begam	married Muslim woman; or Muslim female ruler
bhadralok	gentleman, especially in colonial Bengal
bhadramahila	gentlewoman, especially in colonial Bengal
bismillah	literally, 'In the name of God;' refers to Muslim ceremony to commence formal education
burqa	loose garment covering clothes, form and face of a woman in purdah when leaving the house
chadar	large shawl-like scarf or veil
chardivari	literally, 'four walls;' refers to women's space within a house
Daftar Tarikh	History Office
dai	indigenous midwife
dar ul-harb	literally, 'land of war;' territory where the *shari'at* is not observed
dar ul-Islam	Islamic state where *shari'at* is observed
diwan	prime minister; collection of poems
dulhan	bride, wife
dupatta	long scarf or veil, worn around the shoulders or over the head
durbar	court ceremony; also refers to government of princely state
fatwa (pl. *fatawa*)	formal ruling by an *'alim* or other learned man on a question relating to Islamic law
fiqh	Islamic jurisprudence
ghazal	poem in form of rhyming couplet
hadith	traditions of the Prophet Muhammad; a source of Islamic law
hafiz	one who has memorized the Qur'an

hajj	Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca; one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith
hakim	practitioner of Yunani medicine
haram	women's apartments
hartal	strike
hijab	veil
hijra	flight; migration by Muslims to nearest *dar ul-Islam*
haq (pl. *huquq*)	law, rules
'id	Muslim religious festival
imam	leader, especially of prayer; among Shi'as, spiritual leader of Islamic community, who descends from the Prophet
'ismat	honour, chastity, modesty
izzat	honour
jagir	grant of land to a *jagirdar* with revenue collecting powers usually for services rendered
jagirdar	holder of *jagir*
jahiliyyat	'Age of Ignorance' before Islamic era
jam'iyyat	association or political party
jihad	Muslim holy war of conquest
Ka'aba	shrine of sacred stone at Mecca
kafir	non-believer, i.e. non-Muslim
khadi	handspun and handwoven cloth
khalifa	Caliph; spiritual leader, who is descended from the Prophet
khanadari	housekeeping, household management
khatun	noblewoman
khilafat	office filled by *khalifa*; political movement in India, 1919-1924, in support of Ottoman Caliph
khul'a	divorce initiated by a Muslim woman on certain grounds
kurta	loose, tunic-style shirt
madrasa	Muslim school of higher learning
maharaja	princely ruler

mahr	dower; marriage portion settled on a Muslim bride by pre-marital contract
majlis (pl. *majalis*)	assembly, gathering
maktab	Muslim primary school, often by a mosque, teaching basic elements of the Qur'an
maulana	title usually applied to an exceptionally revered *'alim*, but also, during the Khilafat movement, assumed by, or granted to, leading western-education Muslim politicians
maulvi	title applied to a learned man or teacher
mazawar	religious guide, particularly on *hajj*
memsahib	madam; English lady in India
mina	ladies'
mofussil	countryside, districts
muhajarin	emigrants, particularly those migrating to nearest *dar ul-Islam*
mulla	title often applied in British India to Muslim teacher
munazara	religious debate
namaz	Muslim prayers
nawab	Muslim princely ruler or other aristocrat
nikah	Muslim marriage
nizam	Muslim princely ruler; originally, Mughal governor
pajama	fitted trousers
pakka	permanent
pesh imam	leader of prayer in mosque
pir	religious guide, usually heading a mystical order
purdah	veiling and seclusion of women
purdahnashin	veiled or secluded woman
qazi	judge in Islamic law
qasba	country town or, sometimes, native quarter of British town
qaum	nation, tribe, sect
raj	rule, kingdom
raja	ruler, especially of Rajput clan
Ramadan	month of fasting in Muslim religious calendar

sabha	assembly; usually applied to Hindu assembly
sadhu	Hindu holy man
sanad	title deed
sati	widow immolation; virtuous wife
satyagraha	Gandhian method of passive resistance
shari'at	Islamic law
sharif (pl. *ashraf*)	noble, respectable
sunnah	Muslim traditions
swadeshi	literally, 'own country;' goods manufactured in India; political movement to boycott foreign-made goods
talaq	Muslim divorce
taluqdar	revenue collectors in U.P. with proprietary rights over area
'ulama	plural of *'alim*; learned men
ustani	women teacher, governess
yunani tibb	Islamic system of medicine based on Greek sciences
waqf	Muslim charitable endowment
zakat	alms, usually a percentage of a Muslim's annual income; one of the five pillars of the Muslim faith
zamindar	landlord
zenana	women's quarters

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VII. Personal Communications

Princess Abida Sultaan, eldest daughter of Nawab Hamidullah Khan and Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam of Bhopal, Karachi, Pakistan, 20-29 Oct., 1995.

Princess Rabia Sultaan, youngest daughter of Nawab Hamidullah Khan and Maimuna Sultan Shah Bano Begam of Bhopal, Bhopal, India, 31 Oct., 11 Nov. and 27 Nov., 1996.

Shaharyar M. Khan, son of Princess Abida Sultaan of Bhopal, London, England, 4 Jun., 1996.